

# Comedy of Petty Conflicts

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Wall

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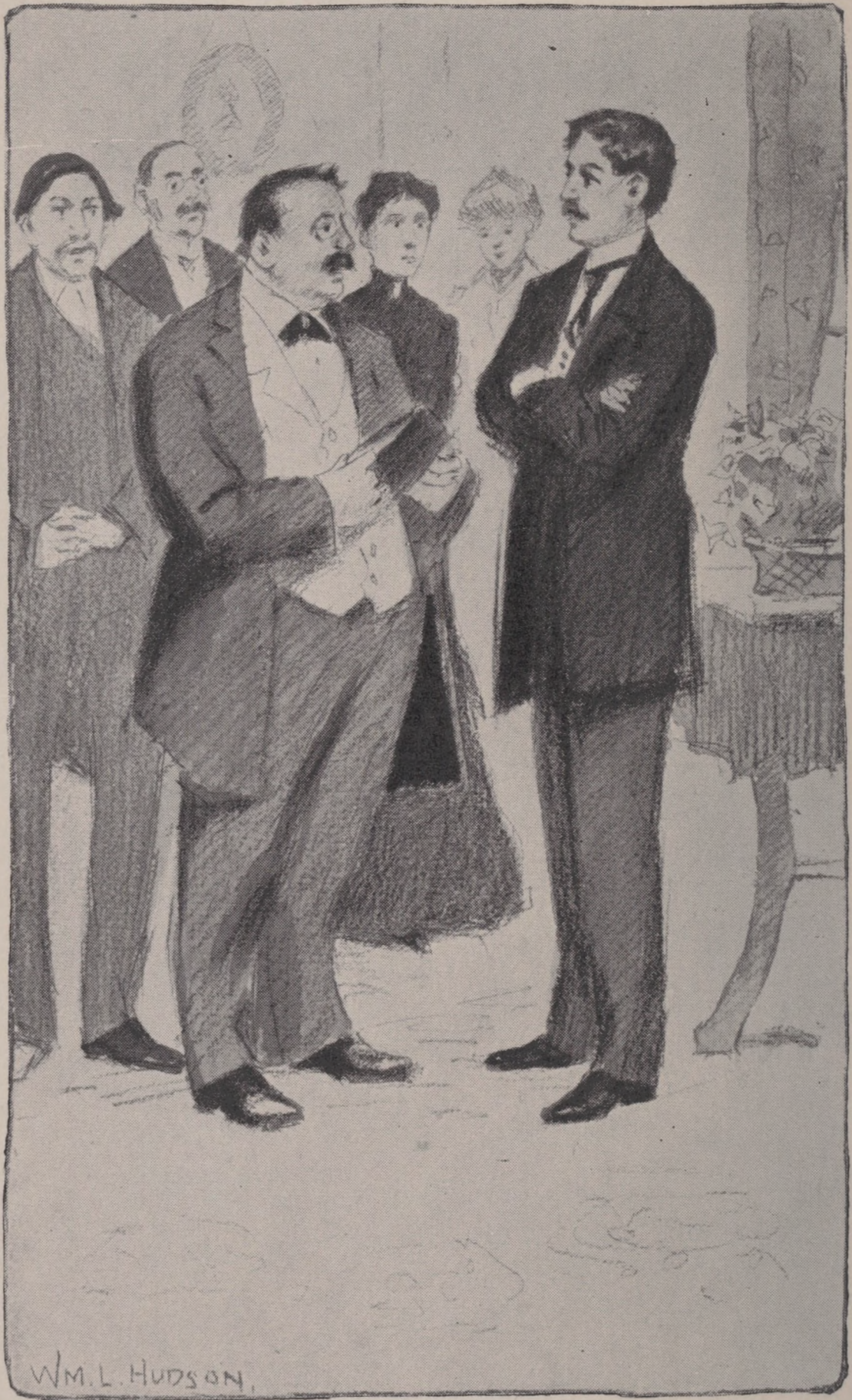












"Where do you figure in a marriage ceremony?"



# Comedy of Petty Conflicts

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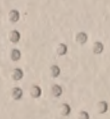
By

IDA BLANCHE WALL

AUTHOR OF

"Sister in Name Only"

"Romance and Tragedy of a Summer"

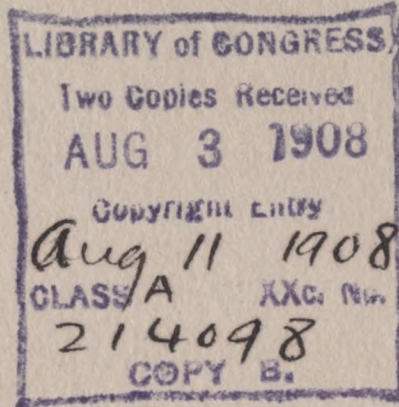


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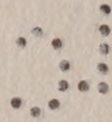
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259. Aug. 4. 1887

DEDICATED TO  
DR. NAT. T. COULSON  
OF 'FRISCO







## FOREWORD.

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

Were it not thus, the fire-inflated editor would have no opportunity of blowing up the magazine and scorching the newspaper in order to purify the literary atmosphere; and there would be no display of his annihilating genius as a scribe and critic. Furthermore, writers would no longer strive to follow closely his lofty requirements, sinking their originality and wit in his overweening "policy."

In the crude production which follows, no claim is laid either to originality or wit. The author has aimed simply to reproduce a Southland story of rapid movement, unvarnished dialogue, and varied incident. Marshalled before the reader's imagination is a miscellaneous assortment of "every day life" comedians, who move about and play their parts in a familiar, blundering fashion, with little regard to the lethargic English drone of scholars. Often a dusky face smiles irresponsibly from our pages. Otherwise, this could not be a Southern story; when, after fifty years of freedom, churches, schools and politics the negro clouds our fair atmosphere with his too frequent atrocities.

If intimate and unpalatable truths are not sufficiently screened from the reader's sensitive-



ness, if the hard places in which he daily sits are found unpadded, or if the cobblestone path which he treads in life's vaudeville march has a tendency to trip him, the writer begs to offer apologies and appreciation for patient attention.

I. B. W.



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# Comedy of Petty Conflicts

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## CHAPTER I.

### AN ELIGIBLE YOUTH.

"What elegance! What grace! What caressing, soul-awakening eyes!" cried Lillian Waters impulsively.

Her cheery smile beamed upon the mirthful company as her eyes wandered about the capacious saloon.

Mrs. Waters turned to her daughter and, as she moved, her diamonds flashed impressively. "Why Lillian, of whom do you speak, dearie?"

"Cadet Rupert Wendell, of course, mamma. Oh, I shall die if I don't get this last waltz with him. He has looked this way forty times, but that hateful Yayda Z. holds him. I'll just signal him to drop her," and in cheerful disregard of conventionalities, a tiny lace guidon fluttered out in frantic appeal.

The indulgent mother smiled bravo. "Is his name on your card for this dance?"

"No, but I'll have part of it, nevertheless, or you may call me an antique."

"How proudly he bears himself, Lillian, as



though all creation were his plaything. I'll warrant him the very king of hearts; he is the type of man women adore. He has paused in the dance, but Yayda still clings. See, he is looking this way; child, be quick, but discreet."

The eager girl made no answer, but with the assurance of Napoleon, glided lightly into the circle of dancers. Just at this crisis the music ceased and the crowd dispersed, but Lillian captured her man. They strolled to a window recess, where she detained him for a quiet tête-à-tête.

Lillian's beauty was transcendent and she was conscious of looking her best as she sat embowered in the feathery palms, the atmosphere redolent with roses and subdued lights. Her sentimental mood was irrepressible. "At last," she sighed, lifting her dreamy eyes. "Oh, dear, I've seen so little of you this evening. And as in a few days you return to West Point, this—is—our—parting." Her caressing voice was full of reproach.

"I shall not forget our pleasant days," Rupert began, but as she nestled nearer and pinned a flower in his buttonhole, words failed him. Inwardly he swore at his own cowardice, his inclination to shrink away. "With the emblem," she had whispered during this crucial process.

Laughing voices soon drew near. "Where is Mr. Wendell? I'm waiting to say good-bye—and I—and I," chimed in several others as a coterie formed. Lillian made a despairing gesture which was enhanced by a pleading look. Rupert's face flushed and, with graceful dignity,



he arose. Immediately a bevy of courageous girls literally besieged him. Full of amenities, these bewitching creatures challenged him through a variety of laughing, wistful, lovelit eyes.

Lillian struck an attitude on the defensive; she threw back her plump shoulders in full power of possession and, with a frozen stare, tried to hold the intruders at bay. She slipped her hand into Rupert's arm and made a mild effort to lead him away, but all to no purpose. The cadet was irresistible to the girls; his ravishing curls induced longings for the thrilling sensation of the laying on of hands. To be his sweetheart or wife were bliss indeed and no feminine artifice was too dear to use with the hope of winning him. Perhaps their refreshing boldness was valid in fashionable circles, but often he felt his cheeks go red.

Rupert stood in abeyance among his worshipers, there was a pucker of embarrassment on his handsome brow, for a storm of jealousy was brewing among the contestants for his favor. To add to his affliction, reproachful glances warned him not to commit the treasonable act of partiality. He was wisely silent. The evening was sultry; having been danced and exercised in moonlight strolls by first one and then another of these analogous creatures, he was footsore and he longed for the luxury of smoking gown and slippers.

Still he faced the batteries. This, his first season, had been a novel delight and he bore his social honors with apparent indifference.



Now that the hour for parting had come, Rupert, the beau-ideal, stood within the circle of eager hearts absolute monarch of his own affections. Often had the freedom of his actions expressed this personal force. With his fine sense of propriety he would exercise man's rights inviolate, and he preferred the obsolescent custom of man doing his own love making.

At two o'clock, when Rupert turned his sleepy eyes toward the beacon light of home, his thoughts, not altogether void of sentiment, reverted to the active rivals who had played him throughout the summer's idle days. "Thoroughbreds, all of them," he murmured conclusively. Though still youthful and quite too slow for his surroundings, his was a fun-loving nature. Gaily he entered his home and glided noiselessly up the dimly lighted stairway. On reaching the upper landing he halted suddenly, for lo! a spectral form appeared before him. Had dry Martini confused him or had Lillian's dauntless spirit confronted him?

There it stood, a slender woman gowned in white. The breath of fragrant roses gave a flavor of romance to the situation and sent forth the thrilling message, "Love—love continued even into the small hours." The phantom form stretched out its arms and became a miracle of yielding affection; it swayed forward and con-signed itself to the shelter of unaccustomed arms.

Rupert's pulses broke into tumultuous motion, for with all recent advantages he was still not an



expert in femininity. But what man could resist a clinging creature like this at such a time, and not be touched by confidence so manifest?

The human in Rupert was dominant. "Marcella, sweetheart," he whispered tentatively, whereat the vision gave a little start—a gasp.

His embrace relaxed somewhat, for something told him the apparition was not Marcella, the guest of his household. Instantly there was a cestus around him; arms bare and dainty encircled his neck, a warm face nestled close to his burning cheeks and soft lips startled his dawning moustache.

"It is I, Pauline," was whispered into his astonished ears. "My fate is in these strong arms, oh, Rupert!"

This information unfolded the record of a past event, bitter and repulsive, something very like a smothered oath escaped the embarrassed youth. Pirouetting gracefully, he disengaged himself from the tendrils of the clinging vine. "Forbear, forbear, Pauline," he exclaimed with fine sarcasm as he put her resolutely aside.

An icy dagger seemed to pierce the disappointed girl's heart. In humiliation she sank upon the step, giving vent to sobs of mortification. The encounter was over so quickly that the next moment Rupert found himself hurrying along the corridor at an accelerated speed, as though eager to avert further meetings.



## CHAPTER II.

## A DOMESTIC SCENE.

With the refrain of Pauline's sobs in his ears, and feeling himself the leading character in a comedy of calf-love, Rupert steered for the safety of his sleeping apartment. At that age he was prone to deal with the realistic side of life. Near the threshold he paused and gazed in profound astonishment at the transom--a light therein warned him that his bed-room was tenanted.

"Another woman in ambuscade?" he questioned half fearfully. "O, ye heathen gods! What shall I do? The very atmosphere seems charged with feminine risks and blandishments to-night." With a humorous smile he then advanced, and beating reveille call upon the door, opened it cautiously.

"Come," said a persuasive voice.

Near a table stood his stepmother, Mrs. Wendell II. Like a ministering angel she hovered over a tray of appetizing supper. Rupert felt inclined to swear, but instead he only smiled. "This is too tough for a practical joke," he told himself, "and is predicative of no good for me. Good-morning, Mother Fox. Up so early for your prey?" he called merrily.

Somehow Mrs. Wendell did not like her



former name from Rupert's lips; there was in it a tone of deep meaning which he took savage delight in expressing. The two stared at each other in uncomfortable silence. "Why, my dear boy, I sat up for you," answered the woman of sharp wits, "thinking you might be hungry I have brought sillabub and jam. Come, let's have a little symposium. Here is some fine wine."

"Oh, thanks," said Rupert, stiffly, "but it would destroy my appetite for breakfast."

Then, with sudden hauteur of manner, he held the door open for her exit. But this inhospitable act did not have the desired effect. She turned her eyes searchingly upon him while she affected an injured air. Rupert had always been amenable; what could this mean? She fanned herself vigorously; it was her habit whenever her mind was active.

"Well, dear, if you will not eat," she said, "close the door; I want to have a confidential talk with you." Mrs. Wendell's gesture was one of command, but her smile one of entreaty as she pointed to a chair. "Sit down," she went on coaxingly, meanwhile settling herself complacently.

Rupert's face took on a baleful expression. He closed the door, but declined to be seated, having under stepmother domination served his term at that punishment long ago. Folding his arms he stood in alienated majesty.

"You are leaving us so soon, Rupert, dear," said Mrs. Wendell without further preliminaries. "Oh, how Pauline and I will miss you"—a succession of prolonged sighs voiced the assurance



that her mission was one of policy. "It is of Pauline I would speak; we must understand each other——"

"I think I made myself very clearly understood in our recent interview," he interrupted impatiently.

"Oh, dear, what nonsense! You and Pauline are mere children and it is my duty to try and insure your future welfare and happiness. Aside from that, my interest in you personally has increased, Rupert, despite your indifference to me. Your father's death was our mutual sorrow, and it should bring us nearer together."

Involuntarily the youth receded a step as his mental vision pictured the unhappy past. Rupert's early childhood was all delight, still his was no lax discipline. In an atmosphere of gentle guidance his many noble attributes developed beautifully, but the rougher side of life presented itself when, at the age of ten, the tomb closed its portals upon the remains of his mother. Almost before his childish grief had calmed into a sorrowful memory, his father married again and the home life became intolerable for the boy. Thereafter he could only dream dreams for the future and cherish ambitions.

Mrs. Wendell II sniffed significantly in recalling sad memories and the little fan again rotated vigorously. "You were once a very bad boy, Rupert," she declared; "wayward, headstrong, disobedient, reckless and haughty. Tearfully have I grieved over your misspent boyhood, and now that my patient training has developed you into a worthy young man, you



should regard my wishes and settle down in life."

"I'll settle," he interposed with a conciliatory gesture, for she was probing deeper and deeper into what he wished to avoid.

"Will you, really?" she asked, watching him keenly. Both were possessed of abnormal strength of purpose concerning this momentous question. "Well, my dear boy, unselfishness and also my profound respect for the dead prompts me to remind you that your father's request should be obeyed. In fact I see no reason why the matter should have been so long deferred."

"Matter deferred," he repeated dazedly. "Madame, your speech mystifies me."

"Well, to be explicit: the eyes of the world are upon you, Rupert. You are charged with innumerable love affairs, even though you are known to be the affianced husband of my daughter Pauline."

Mrs. Wendell in this announcement had overstepped the limit of endurance. Rupert's broad chest expanded and his voice rang out in a torrent of scorn--"Your daughter Pauline's husband! What a nightmare!"

"Yes, sir, beyond doubt you have irrevocably pledged yourself to wed my daughter when you are twenty-one." The speaker's pale eyes blinked rapidly. This symptom warned the youth that in his dilemma silence was the better part of self-vindication and self-preservation as well.

The mother's temper was smouldering, so she resorted to mild vituperation and servile flattery. But concerning this very illogical ques-



tion she clung to the ragged skirts of a forlorn hope. "Rupée, you disappoint my dearest earthly hopes," she wailed. "True, you have been idolized by women quite enough to mislead any youth, but you should be strong and discourage these shameless creatures who throw themselves at you."

"I have just discouraged the most shameless of them all," he interposed vigorously.

"Good! Tell me who it was." Then she fell to guessing. "Was it Gertrude Flick? Amy Race? Dr. Thorne's fast daughter? Nell Hugo? Mademoiselle Marcella? Miss Hornick? The grass widow? The actress? The trained nurse Catchem? or," and she paused for him to speak.

"Haven't you omitted some few from the catalogue?"

Eager for a bit of scandal, Mother Fox had risen and drew near her prey, but in quick surprise she caught her breath and stared hard. "Why, Rupert Wendell! What do I see hanging from your button? Bless my soul if it isn't Pauline's gold chain and heart. She wore them an hour ago when she kissed me good-night."

Were all the furies conspired against him? Sure enough, there was a fragment of thread-like chain clinging to him with all the affection of its owner. Beneath his accuser's searching gaze the innocent youth almost suffocated.

"Explain yourself, sir!" she commanded, feigning to be shocked beyond measure.

At this display of mock virtuous indignation Rupert braced himself and maintained the courage of his inclinations. "There seems to be an



active game of hearts going on continually, madame," he said icily, "and I presume my button caught this trinket on the rebound. The moral atmosphere is becoming rather oppressive."

Mrs. Wendell II allowed her face to relax into a vulpine smile, possibly the cause was not lost after all. "Naughty boy," she cried, tapping his shoulder caressingly with the expressive little fan, "wait until Pauline is yours before you—you——"

"I'll wait," he interrupted vehemently.

As she nosed around he wondered would she scent any more secrets, or find further evidence against him? At that moment a miscellaneous assortment of weblike handkerchiefs muffled the throb of his invincible heart and his pockets bulged with feminine favors—ribbon, gloves, beads, bangles, cards and bits of sentimental verse, many of which had been thrust upon him. He registered a mental vow that before the next day waned the coal scuttle should claim them all.

"Two thirty o'clock!" Rupert closed his watch with an insinuating snap, but the persistent woman was evidently there to stay.

"Pert," she pleaded, "recall the conditions of the will; your solemn promise and what its fulfillment means to us all. Pauline remains true to her part in the marriage contract. Why wait two years?"

"Marriage contract!" cried Rupert, now thoroughly aroused. "Surely you would not take a mean advantage——"

"It was your father's dying request."



"Forbear! and never again refer to that subject," he commanded sternly. "I want to forget such a sordid scene, for your attempts at graft on that sad occasion were execrable, and you are at heart a murderess!"

Then becoming calmer he wondered why his hand had found its way to his hip pocket and if during the whole of his life he would be made to wriggle and squirm beneath the ban of woman. He felt for the first time a kindling respect for wife beaters. And while confronting his tormentor he seemed no longer the debonair boy, but a strong man defending honor. Sorely tried in the clash of duties at last he spoke his latent conviction with sincerity.

For a moment the woman became almost transmuted; she forgot the role she played and literally charged upon her stepson. Her eyes snapped and flickered like flames of burning sulphur as the tide of her passion rose beyond its confines.

"Quite like old times," Rupert thought; as she advanced upon him step by step he retreated, until he found himself in an alcove of the room, conquered and cowed, but not subjugated. At length there came an armistice. Then the wind shifted and once more soft breezes whispered of love and Pauline.

"Pert," she said mournfully, "you didn't hear all."

"I heard enough," he panted, mopping his face, for he was sweltering in the heat of close quarters, and it was an unpleasant reminder of his imprisonment in dark closets long ago.

"Believe me, it is not your money that I want,



Rupert; I plead for my child's happiness. Pauline loves you and you have trifled with her affections. You were caught red-handed to-night—the broken chain condemns you. Oh, Pert, you are too manly to condemn to death a girl's love and faith. Bereft of your presence Pauline's life is a barren waste. Her love is a fathomless mine; its wealth all yours. She would cling to you."

A rancorous grunt was heard. "I am not in the mining business," he replied most ungraciously, and his face darkened as he recalled the tenacity of Pauline's embraces.

"You promised your father upon your word of honor, now did you not, Rupert?"

Strong truth burst the bounds of restraint. A new light flashed into his superb eyes and color into his cheeks. "Madame," he said calmly, "I recall the lamentable fact that upon hard pressure I did make some off-hand promise to marry Pauline, which I have never since given a serious thought."

"What!" cried Mrs. Wendell II, in righteous indignation. "You have been taking a lover's liberties with my daughter and now you would break faith with her?"

A moment of tense silence passed and then in a conclusive manner Rupert rendered a wholesome verdict. "Marry Pauline!" he said in a cold withering tone, "for the second and last time I assure you that I will not—no, never, never——"

"Villain!" shrieked the mother. "I'll have you arrested! I'll detain you here and sue you for



breach of promise! I'll have justice or bloodshed!"

After this ominous declaration she swept haughtily from the room.

Awaiting a still more calamitous scene, Rupert, with quickening pulses stared, open-eyed at the doorway a moment, but as nobody appeared he wearily prepared for rest. There was no lack of courage; but, under the circumstances, there was a suggestion of powerlessness on his part and a yearning desire to atone for whatever wrong he had done. Only money could do this, he knew, and with his hopes and future ambitions, such sacrifice could not be made altogether in a spirit of benevolence. But he dismissed his thought as selfish and decided to make the sacrifice cheerfully.



## CHAPTER III.

## POUNDING THE PARSON.

Sweet sleep beguiled unhappy Rupert's melancholy and cleared his weary brain. Rich, still, in the dreams of youth, he fancied that his future intercourse with inscrutable woman should be so tempered with wisdom and discretion that trouble would never again cast anchor in the harbor of his hopes. Never again would he be the ready victim of female wiles.

With considerable exhilaration of spirit Rupert began to prepare for his departure and would have effected his retreat from N—— with soldierly success if, at noon, he had not been summoned downstairs.

Rupert hurried down and entered the back parlor. To his amazement he heard the key turn in the lock behind him. What did it mean? Was he a prisoner? The window blinds were closed, curtains drawn and daylight severely excluded. Under the brilliant light of the chandelier his stepmother confabulated with two of her compatriots—Watts and McDow. A portly man, whom he recognized as Deacon Hawkins, one of her relatives, sauntered around the room in a preoccupied manner.

Apparently unobserved, Rupert stood motion-



less for a moment. The presence of these people recalled a summer vacation spent in the country long ago when Hawkins seemed to be the only vile object contaminating its celestial atmosphere. Pleasant was the memory of those days in summer's golden glow among verdant hills and valleys, orchards rich in color and humming with life, where, in the big heart of mother nature, temptation and restraint weigh not upon the soul and where all the precious privileges, dear to a boy's heart, are enjoyed to the fullest. Once again he saw the clear river where people were baptized, the quaint log church in a woodland dell, and the ranting old minister whose finger was always pointing below. He lined the hymns and Hawkins led in the singing.

"Good-morning," called a deep voice, interrupting Rupert's reverie.

"Good-morning," he responded, slowly approaching the group. "Why am I summoned here?" Too well he grasped the meaning of that grotesque gathering. "Fate has plotted against me again," he groaned inwardly, "and there will be no Lethean cure for this horrid ultimatum."

Then Hawkins drew near and, looking Rupert over with ill-concealed dislike, issued the fiat: "You, Wendell, are the chief figure of an enforced marriage, and these young men present will, if you make the slightest resistance, execute justice."

"Ah?" questioned Rupert with scornful defiance, all the fire of his proud nature kindling. Self-command almost forsook him and he sniffed the air like a war horse. Barred in, and sur-



rounded by enemies, what could he do? The close air seemed full of expectant gunpowder.

Pauline's face was apprehensive; she seemed to have no volition in the matter. Her lips were quivering and tears flooded her eyes. She was, after all, only a tool in the hands of her mother. In the hottest fever of his life, Rupert's brain was active. Possibly the girl's better nature might assert itself and his conduct be vindicated after all. He knew Hawkins to be a man of many words and to be extremely illiterate. Perhaps by parrying the question as long as possible he might impede any action in this mill of torture. It was the only hope.

With a dogmatic air Hawkins took his position near a flower-laden stand, opened a prayer-book and began to fumble with its pages. "Candidates for matrimony will come forward," he said with ridiculous solemnity.

"Where do *you* figure in a marriage ceremony?" asked Rupert, a tremor in his voice.

"I am a *preacher*—a very necessary party."

"Ape reacher," repeated Rupert, imitating both tone and emphasis. "Well, sir, you are reaching up to a position you are not qualified or destined to fill."

"A parson then, you stupid boy."

"Ah, indeed, since when, pray?"

"Since I took to the pulpit," replied Hawkins sharply, and, being thrown off his guard, he lapsed into solecism.

"Took to the pulpit," laughed Rupert, "is no doubt a good description of your theological



career. But why not say since you took to the water?"

"Yes, water too, for I am a straightout hard shell Baptis', the pure in heart."

"By what authority do you hold in your hand an Episcopal prayer-book, sir?"

"Mrs. Wendell requested me to read the marriage ceremony from out of it, but for my part I'd much ruther use my own church form; it's more to the p'int. I don't b'lieve in preachin' and prayin' out of a book; thar ain't no heart in it."

Hawkins scrutinized the book as though on slight encouragement he would give it a severely adverse criticism. In that strenuous moment Rupert's perceptive faculty took in the comic situation.

"Where are your clerical robes?" he questioned with plaintive irony.

"I don't wear them kind," sneered Hawkins, "and when some o' the church sisters, who had got a rise in worldly affairs, tried to introduce them into our pulpit and choir, I kicked and bucked like a bronco. No 'Piscopal blood in me—no mixture of saint and sinner. One night thar was to be a pound party at my house—'a poundin' o' the parson,' they call it. People gathered from every which a way. Somebody asked if a violin could be brought in. 'Yes, certainly,' I said, not knowing the instrument by that name. To my eternal horror the man brought in a fiddle—the devil's own instrument, and but for my plain talk there would have been rough house. Now, if that had been a 'Piscopal parson he'd



allowed dancing, fiddling and cards, too. See the p'int?

"Your stepmother thar usen to be a devout Baptis', but after her second marriage she got a rise in the fashionable world and jined the worldly-minded church; still, at heart——"

"She is Baptist to the core," interrupted Rupert fervently. "But you are discursive, sir. Since you condemn the Episcopal faith why plagiarize its service?"

"I, myself, don't do no such thing," contradicted Hawkins, warming up in his defence. "I don't b'lieve in it."

"You must believe what you read from that book, sir, or else your ceremony would not be binding."

"I don't b'lieve it, I tell you, and I never adopted no sech a bobbing up and down form o' wash up neither. The women folks they git high falutin' once in a while and try to imitate the 'Piscopilians."

"They deserve credit," remarked Rupert candidly, "for trying to educate themselves up to a higher standard of church doctrine. Then, shall the Bible prophecy be fulfilled. There shall be one shepherd and one fold. Instead of being satisfied with simply 'taking to the pulpit,' as you say, you, too, should be willing to climb to the dignity of clerical eminence, and until you are qualified for that priestly office you will kindly not subject our service to bathos."

Rupert relieved the astonished parson of the book, and with reverence placed it on a table. Mrs. Wendell II stared fiercely at him and the



little fan accelerated its motion. In her younger days she had, despite Hawkins' bucking tendencies, introduced into the "Hardshell" faith a strange commingling of creeds. The deposed parson struck an unfriendly attitude and shook a menacing fist in Rupert's face; then, turning to Watts and McDow, said, "Now, boys, do your part."

It was no carnival occasion. Rupert was strung up to a high pitch and yearned for decisive action.

"If you will take me one at a time," he said, quietly, "we will proceed without further ado."

"No need of violence, Mr. Wendell," advised Watts, stepping forward, closely followed by McDow. "My aunt tells me that after being engaged to her daughter for many years and, after taking all manner of liberties with her, you now seek to be released from all obligations to her. So just lead my cousin Pauline up to Mr. Hawkins and let him tie the knot. Stand up like a man, or take the result." He fixed his steel gray eyes searchingly upon Rupert and laid a heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"Take your hand from my shoulder!" Fire was in Rupert's eyes and murder in his voice. Watts and McDow exchanged glances; each understood that Wendell would not be coerced. Nor would he die like a coward. They fell back a pace and he stood alone. Folding his arms and with elevated chin Rupert stared defiantly at his stepmother; his lofty air held the others spell-bound. "I will not marry Pauline," he said vehemently. "I'll take the consequences."



Deathlike silence followed for a full minute; even the little fan ceased to flutter.

Pauline seemed stupefied and disheartened. Her mother discerned this and stood for the girl's strength. There was an evil light in her eyes as she gave Hawkins a significant glance. Rupert knew then that her resemblance to Guido's demon was not imaginary on his part.

Hawkins then reasserted his authority. "I am waiting to proceed with the ceremony," he cried petulantly, but no one took heed of his announcement. At an outright sob from Pauline Rupert turned to her in commiseration. In thrilling tones he appealed to her womanhood. The strength and chastity of his words seemed divine inspiration for the girl. She trembled and weakened under the spell of his compelling gaze.

Watts and McDow, who had watched keenly the entire proceeding, turned their eyes upon Mrs. Wendell in painful disgust. Her equivocal statement had entirely misled them. Feeling compunction these sagacious young men began to move restlessly about the room.

Pauline turned penitently to Rupert. "Forgive me," she said, folding her hands as though in devotion. "You have never wronged me, Rupert—I love you—love—you—always." She grew deathly pale and swayed like a willow branch.

McDow caught her in his arms and bore her from the room. Mrs. Wendell II scowled vindictively. Hawkins turned his batteries of wrath full upon Rupert. "See the suffering your rascality has caused these innocent, helpless wom-



en!" he yelled in his pulpit key. "Young man, may everlasting damnation and eternal——"

With the spring of a practiced athlete Rupert was in full possession of the man's throat and the benediction of white heat was cut short. The room jarred as though an earth-wave had struck it, for brute force against athletic skill seemed for a moment to equalize the combat. But Hawkins had more determination than wind, and spent his strength hitting out wildly, while his agile opponent parried the blows. With failing strength he sank gradually and, all unconsciously, struck the attitude of "The Dying Gladiator."

In this denouement Watts, of bloody instinct, watched calmly "the pounding of the parson." Mrs. Wendell II did not shriek—public opinion was more to her than life. She took refuge behind a cabinet while the last vestige of her chimerical scheme vanished and then she proceeded to revivify the prostrate man.

What a picture of serenity Rupert presented when the contest was over! Except for a slight pallor and artistically dishevelled curls, his outward appearance was unruffled. Deeply contrite that, in the heat of passion he had struck an older man, he stood looking down upon his enemies. In the majesty of guileless youth he was like a symbol seen in a sculpture gallery in Rome of a human soul with its choice of purity or evil—a child clasping a dove to its bosom, while assaulted by a serpent.

In a strange unnatural spell Rupert watched his stepmother. He felt a certain charm in gazing for the last time upon her hardened face.



Then, with a turbulent overflow of emotion, a groan escaped his lips. He turned and strode away, feeling himself an exile and a dishonored guest in his own household.



## CHAPTER IV.

## FORTUNE'S SMILE.

One month later Mrs. Wendell II was agreeably surprised to find her bank account abundantly augmented. This magnanimous act on Rupert's part proved him capable of unselfishness in a high degree. It awakened more fully his in-born energy and gave a deeper meaning to life. Being self-reliant, the strong-hearted youth did not mourn the absence of money. Freed from the machinations of his stepmother, he congratulated himself on having fared so well.

Fully resolved to embody every faculty in making himself a successful lawyer he was soon admitted to the bar. He established himself in the South—of the soft skies, that land which is marred by the black and sluggish tide which sweeps a polluting current impending advancement and blighting its beauty.

But Fate was kind after all, for whenever Rupert entered the courtroom inspiration awaited him there. With élan he poured forth an untrammelled wealth of speech, fascinating all within hearing. Beside, he possessed the rare charm of wooing others to accept his expressed ideas as their own sentiment. In his first case he evinced his ability to defend a client even in



the very face of the law. After this event scores of clients sought him and soon numbers of important cases were pending. The rush became so great that very soon a partner was a necessity.

A soul-stirring speech in a difficult criminal case soon startled the public. It was indeed a memorable occasion, when with an armor of courage and genius, like a conqueror, he severed the enslaving chains of his client and bore him safely out of danger's confines. He had won against the recognized talent of his ambitious and renowned opponent.

Caught in the tide of prosperity, Rupert Wendell was hurried onward, and meanwhile his financial affairs were most prosperous. He ventured into speculation and invariably won. Full of resources, he soon found himself possessed of an ideal farm, well appointed and situated just beyond the city limits. This was a lucrative enterprise in itself if properly managed.

One day, in answer to an advertisement, "Experienced farmer wanted," Job Croaker, an old negro from slavery times, presented himself with the required recommendation. As Job walked searchingly around the office, his simious face rose like a soot ball from a four-inch depth of snowy celluloid. He held in his hand a battered high hat which the original Job might have disported. Flopping tails of a sleek frock coat fanned his heels and his pompous manner emphasized the vainglory he felt in exhibiting his smart attire.

It was impossible to secure white labor, so Job Croaker was put in charge. With lavish supplies



and cash each week he soon became autocrat of the farm and fairly revelled in his good fortune. Absolutely unlearned in the ups and downs of farm struggle, Wendell's was no prosaic idea in that particular line. His poetic fancy could see in the near future fields of waving green and gold, well-kept cattle grazing on the hillside—in short, a fount of pastoral wealth and beauty.

Popularity followed in the train of success, and once more Rupert was fast becoming the very magnet among the devotees of pleasure. Unconsciously, however, for at the particular epoch, pride in his professional career was paramount to all else, and if he possessed the sporting tendencies of youth they were still dormant. With Wendell's entree into society, libation was offered and among the gentler sex there was a lifting up of hearts to his handsome form and grace.

At first there was something too breezy and invigorating about the moral atmosphere for one of his quiet habits, but with easy manner he presently acquiesced, jested and made merry. Besides, he had never before been so agreeably entertained, so completely taken out of himself. Insensibly he began to rely less upon the comfort and satisfaction that one finds in the discharge of duty. As his character strengthened and matured, the beautiful world of reality, its splendor, its thrill of life and alluring vices interested him. Being lifted high in social favor, bombardment both daring and subtle were made upon his affections. But quietly self-possessed he withstood a siege of that kind. His was a



generous nature, but the high-minded youth soon saw with a pang of disappointment that even among people of unmistakable gentility propriety was acceded rights and privileges not her due.

In his supremacy Rupert felt fully equipped to strengthen his defences against feminine wiles and ventured freely into the atmosphere of temptation. With the broadening of his views things heretofore condemned seemed not so bad after all. "One must keep with the band wagon," he soon informed his questioning conscience, "if one would dance to its music."

Flattered beyond the power of man's resistance, his creative mind foresaw himself the brilliant success of the age. But in the strenuous life of pleasurable excitement a gradual check was put upon meritorious exertion in his professional career, and soon energy was being spent in another direction. Finally he ceased to be a man of action and then time passed merrily enough.

The gaudy type of woman, with her eyes always upon him, her familiar ways and absence of dignity did not really appeal to Rupert's finer instincts; she influenced but failed to charm. But all unknown to himself there had already sprung up in the garden of his great heart a modest flower thought of a school girl. When in sweet solitude he had whispered: "She is not like other girls; she is modest, she is womanly, she is tender. Her love will be as pure as vestal fire. Lucky the fellow who wins that love, O winsome child, O peerless Theo."



## CHAPTER V.

## A LAMENT.

Alone in his office at an early hour one morning, Rupert sat facing a formidable array of bills, endeavoring to sum up his expense account. "Sporting life comes high," he summarized, sinking wearily back into his chair as he realized that while he was chained to the fastest set in B—, his savings had disappeared like dust in a whirlwind. Nights of revelry had been followed by days of restless movement, wearing upon nerve and brain and chilling ambition.

"This dissipation shall stop," Rupert promised his better self, cast down yet hopeful. "It shall stop or the ultimate result will be failure, ruin and moral shipwreck. I had believed my genius recognized and that wealth and fame were within my grasp. The skeleton of a lost opportunity confronts me unexpectedly. While I might have been giving free access to my intellectual power and regenerative force I have been leading the life of a prodigal fool. To be continually trapped into engagements with pleasure-seeking females," he lamented, "shows little evidence of sanity." For a time remorse tortured the young man of weak flesh and willing spirit. Then determination of equal force swept over him and



he swore allegiance to the words he had spoken: "It shall stop."

While in solitude he had often felt the very unsatisfying result, the sense of peace and contentment disturbed by a restless desire for novelty, a realization that in catching the shadow he was losing the substance. But while his soul was full of yearning for a nobler career, frivolous womankind seemed to be weaving discordant colors in the strange fabric of his life. While thus cogitating Rupert's tired head sank gradually to the desk and kindly sleep folded him in oblivion.

But slumber was disturbed by an early visitor. The farm manager, Job Croaker, had come with his semi-weekly report of farm disaster. Croaker had not, for veracity, the reputation of George Washington; his chief idiosyncrasy lay in presenting the dark side of things greatly magnified. Job's restless eyes looked searchingly around the office as he held in his hand his most valued possession—the high hat.

"Mornin', Mas Rupert," he called noisily, after he had dexterously pocketed a handful of cigars from a box on the mantel, "you drap sleep, sar? I 'spec' you young mens does walk 'bout too much in de night time."

Wendell was irritated by the intrusion; besides, he had lost faith in Job's righteousness. "Good-morning, Croaker, what's the trouble now? Any more farm complications?" he questioned, somewhat drowsily.

"In dealing with cunning persons," says Francis Bacon, "we must ever consider their ends to



interpret their speech, and it is good to say little unto them."

On this logical assurance Job was allowed to pour out his full complaint.

"No sar," he declared, "so far as I myself is co'sarned ebery ting gone long bedout a hitch, but I can't say no good 'bout den torra no' count nigger on de fa'm. At night, I gots to sleep wid one eye open, or else de plough boys will tief de hoss an' mule out'n de stable an' ride all ober de country till fowl crow, they inglect to water de cre'tur. Da boy Sam tief de hoss feed an' trade um wid de blind tager man, on de conder, fer grog. Sam is tossicate one half o' de time. Two o' de hoss is down on de lift dey so weak from hongry, dey can't git up none 'tall. Fox an' wild cat tak' all de tuckey an' guinea——"

"Beware of hyperbole, Croaker," interrupted his hearer.

"Dem don' come 'bout de place in de day time, sar. I spec you mean dem hypotamus wa dar in de riber swamp. 'Tis true I did shoot one torro night wid a live pig in 'e mouth, but he run, gone wid de pig all de same.

"De boys lef' de new ha'ness out in de rain, ruin um, they tief the lock off'n de dog house——"

"Thriving farm you have there, Croaker, but mind don't you let anything happen to my bird dogs, or I'll shoot you into a honeycomb," threatened Wendell, becoming interested because his dogs were imperiled.

"Well, boss, please don't shoot me sar, kase I done de best I kin, but Abraham Jackson, he



done dead an t'row out sence last week. Andrew Lincoln, 'e de la' down dar eber sence 'e tookin sick, but 'e aint dead not yit. Now, Mas Rupert, I peticuler want you to exwise me, 'bout dat new mule Shoofly dat you bring from de hauction sale torro day. Dat mule done testify dat 'e aint agwine to plough. I coax um, I push um, I lick um an' in spite o' ebery oder sperement I try wid um 'e balk, balk nuttin but balk. Shoofly act like 'e might cut an awfully capre if you crowd um, kase yistiddy 'e shake 'e numble heel arter we boys. Shoofly is a westerly mule an' don't seem to quaintan wid nigger. I t'ink you better le' me trade um off fer a oxin."

"No, indeed," cried Wendell, for the first time asserting some authority, "that mule cost two hundred dollars. He is a fine animal, but has never been trained for field work. Don't give up—stand by him yet a while."

"Stan' up by um!" cried the negro warmly, "I 'clar to God, Mas Rypert, I stan' up in de cotton field by dat tarrifying mule dis whole week gone, an' de plough boys tak exwantage o' dat p'ovokin' sarcumstance to come stan' up wid me, meantime de grass takin' de cotton. Sam suggist dat we t'row down de mule, rub sand in 'e mout' an' put crockle burr in 'e yers. Anoder no 'count nigger beg me to le'm tie cannon crackers to Shoofly tail."

"You certainly didn't allow any such cruelty?" said Wendell sharply.

"Oh, no sar, I didn't le' dem ignoramusy nigger pusscribe de treatmen', but I sho try ebery oder punishmen' dat is rickomen' fer halkin'



mule. I did hear say dat if you shoot balkin' mule from de rear wid peas an' fat bacin dey will move up, but I wouldn't try dat new spere-ment bedout I ax you fust."

Wendell bit his lip hard to repress an oath, and was silent for a full minute while Croaker watched his face keenly to see if he approved of the last suggestion. Finally, with a gesture toward the door, Rupert cried: "Go, I can spare you no more time. Possibly the mule is accustomed to hauling; put him to the wagon to-morrow and drive into the city for supplies."

"All right, sar!" cried Job gleefully as he shuffled out. "I'll gamble on my last dollar dat Shoo-fly will pull dat wagin."



## CHAPTER VI.

## TELEPHONE FLASHES.

For Rupert the next day was one upon which everything went wrong. While busily engaged in his office in the forenoon there was a call for him at the 'phone. It was Job who spoke.

"Mas Rupert, dat is you? Well, sar, I call you to tell you say dat Shoofly mule is balk by de 'oman exchange building, zackly 'pontap de switch o' de street ca' track. I tried to lead him off by 'e mange, kase 'e don't rickonize bridle an' bit, but 'e t'row up 'e head so high 'e lift me clean off'm de ground. Den, when de cornductor run de street ca' close up behin' um an' hail in a loud woice, Shoofly 'spute dat man's right o' way. Den de cornductor he git bex an' push de wagin' 'pontap Shoofly an' yit dat mule stan' 'e ground an' brace back wid sech detarmination dat de ca' switch off an' ge de mule de track.

"Sar? You ax me wa' in de hell I done wid de mule? I done eberyting dat is rickomend fer mule plague wid balk.

"Sar? Lick um? I lick um till my whip done wear out, den I gouge um wid de handle. Sar? Butt um an' kick um? Why boss I hold um wid my two han' an' butt um till 'e skull crack, den I kick um till my foot hot me. Twiss 'e tail? No



sar, I neber do dat, one drummer man do dat rash ack. Sar? I dunno, sar. De las' time I see um some oder drummer mens had um in a hambulanch gwine wid um—but I bet you he'll neber twiss mule tail gen!

"Mas Rupert, I eben made fire underneat' dat mule an' yit fer all dat 'e wouldn't budge. De ha'ness? Dat done bu'n up. De wagin? It aint bu'n bad liker de ha'ness, but 'e can't nuse gen. Sar? You say I been playing wid Helen General? No, sar, I ain't broke my breat' to a 'oman to-day.

"Mas Rupert, Shoofly is 'rested by de perlice. One light skin kind o' black an' tan' 'oman come 'long on a freemale hoss an' Shoofly grab de 'oman foot wid 'e mout' juck um off'n de hoss. De 'oman heaby weight shoes is all dat sabe 'e life an' keep 'e foot from bite off. Oh, don't cuss me boss! Sar? Who is de 'oman? I ain't quaintan wid um, sar, 'e from de back 'oods. Now rickolick, boss, dat Shoofly is underneat' 'restment an' I kin do nuttin' in de matter till you pay de damage. Perlice cha'ge is five dollar fer wiolation o' de town o'd'nance, de 'oman ch'ge is ten dollar fer de mule bite 'e foot an' stresspus on 'e hoss in de public t'oroughfare."

At that moment it was fortunate for the negro as well as for the mule that distance lay between them and their master.

Involuntarily Wendell armed himself with a pistol as he rushed out of the office. "I'll flatten bullets on that damned nigger's impregnable skull," he promised his fully aroused temper. "It



will give me keen delight, beside that invigorating sport is legal in this part of the world."

He found Job of woebegone countenance hovering over the wagon wreck and fragments of harness; but the mule of Western grit was nowhere to be seen. Job, greatly distressed, bereft of his high hat, hobbled forward to explain the sudden change in affairs. "Boss," he cried in a dolorous voice, "when I left dis yer free show we had yer to talk to you through de telegraph, Shoofly bruck out o' ha'ness, 'tice dat 'oman hoss off an' gone wid um—but you jist wait till I ketch dat mule gen!"

"Sell the mule immediately," commanded his master in tones of repressed anger. "Take any price for him rather than carry him back to the farm."

Job rolled his eyes and he heaved a sigh of relief. "All right, boss," he replied, "I tink dat is a wise co'clusion. I'm putty sho dat I kin sold Shoofly to dat same black an' tan 'oman dat you owe ten dollar fer de mule bite 'e foot. I bet him husbunt is de right doctor to 'tend mule sick wid de balk. I'se a gwine right now to help de 'oman hunt 'e hoss an' same time ketch dat tarrifying debil Shoofly."

\* \* \* \* \*

When the season of bountiful harvest lay full upon the land, for his share of the farm proceeds Wendell reaped only the aftermath. That enterprise proved absolute failure and loss. There was still something invested in mining interests, but being never very exacting where money was



concerned, he sold his shares for half their value and paid his debts to the last penny.

In his impecunious condition he could not remain longer in B—, for he would never again be citizen courtier. Having been despoiled and deceived by false gods, in future he would fall back more than ever upon the rich resources of his real self.



## CHAPTER VII.

## A TURBULENT SPINSTER.

The cynicism and flintiness of Charlotte Flint-of's disposition was not a natural heritage; only after a few rounds of experience in the arena of life had she discovered these tendencies in herself, succumbed to the petty conflicts of earth, and after the fashion of owls, nighthawks and moths, had given herself over to brooding in places of darkness. The acrid drop which had turned the milk of her nature was, of course, the base infidelity of the inferior sex.

In her early girlhood she had been too straight-laced for the understanding of faulty man. Twice she had stood upon the threshold of romance, and twice the door had closed upon her expectations. She drank of the cup of wormwood when she was prepared for the very elixir of life. Her name was obliterated from Love's register, and in her rebellion she trained herself to snap and snarl at the very thought of matrimonial felicity. The tenderness and passion which had once glowed in her face soon hardened into a cold and calculating leer. Her maternal instincts were swallowed in disappointment, and her conscience was smothered in hate. At thirty she looked upon the pleasures of life with the



morose contempt that belongs to sullen age; and her gloomy countenance promised that when grown old she would become a repulsive hag. She spurned the masculine sex with all the vindictiveness of her nature; she searched out the vulnerable spots in men's natures, and run into them the malicious sting of her pessimism.

But the even tenor of her disgruntlement was doomed to interruption, when her sister's infant, Theo, was left to her especial care. This bit of humanity's extreme youth and helplessness appealed to her; a spark of affection was rekindled in her frozen heart. The spinster was a pious soul, gauged by the tape measure of unpliable orthodox religious principles. She reared Theo with laudable circumspection—prayerfully, and in an atmosphere of out-of-date moral conservatism. To shield the girl from the beguiling influence of reprobate man was the respectable lady's most fervent desire.

When fifteen years old Theo was sent to boarding school, where she soon developed into graceful womanhood. Miss Flintof was very proud of her and would anticipate with pleasure the summer vacations at home. The girl was dainty and fragile, her heart was warm and expansive, her mind pure and trusting, her manner always kindly and gracious. She suggested the delicate brightness of an April sunbeam, smiling upon all things.

Some such thought as this occurred to Rupert Wendell when she came into his boy life. One beautiful day in spring Rupert, then a lad of seventeen, vaulted the high wall of Miss Flintof's



back yard after a ball which accidentally had been thrown there. He ran headlong into a luxuriant clematis vine, and was surprised to receive into his outstretched arms a bundle of soft mull and filmy lace, which proved to be a bit of loveliness in the form of little Theo. With a startled cry she held to her breast a white dove, which she was taking from the "virgin's bower."

"Were you after my dove, boy?" she cried in a panic. "Don't take it away from me—don't hurt it!"

The boy blushed, stammered an excuse, and hurried away, his pulses in a tumult of embarrassment. But he never forgot the incident; and whenever he passed that way he looked for the fairy like girl. But three years elapsed before he again feasted his eyes upon her spiritual beauty. Then his heart cried out with the strength of early manhood, "I want her—I want her!" And as a thoughtless boy, with ruthless hand, grasps a beautiful bird or flower, he sought to possess himself of the coveted prize.

On a peaceful Sabbath day, at the close of Easter services, Miss Flintof hastened to her prim colonial residence. She was in that supremely tranquil state of mind that results from having fulfilled a duty. For had she not received absolution from the good father? She entered her drawing room in search of her protégé, who was at home for the holidays. Not finding the girl, she passed noiselessly over the thickly carpeted floor, and opened the door of the library. With a sudden gasp she halted on the threshold. She flipped her hand before her



eyes as if to brush away an illusion. But the tableau before her persisted in all its concrete and shocking reality. The sanctity of her virginal abode had been invaded by the enemy.

A young man of dashing and military appearance, superb in his physical structure, stood near the mantel. Beside him, clasped in his arms, with her head resting confidently against his shoulder, was Theo. The girl, upon whom Miss Flintof had always looked as a model of modesty and propriety, held her face up to her lover, and the young people's lips met in all the fervor of first love. Visions of her own blighted hopes arose in Miss Flintof's mind, magnifying the lovers' offense; and in fiery ill-temper she darted forward.

"Rupert Wendell, what are you doing here?" she cried in a loud voice. "How dare you steal into my house in my absence, and take such liberties with my niece? Theo, you shameless imp of duplicity, what am I to understand by behavior so degrading?"

"Aunt Charlotte!" exclaimed the pink and white beauty, turning several shades pinker, and bringing her little palms together, as if in supplication.

"Dear Miss Flintof," said the offending Apollo easily, "I beg of you, do not misunderstand Miss Theo. I—we love each other, and we want your consent to our marriage. Theo has promised——"

But before the young man could say what Theo had promised, Miss Flintof brought down her umbrella with a sounding whack on his curly





Miss Flintof brought down her umbrella with a sounding whack on his curly head.







head. In dignified disgust the good lady's hymnal and prayer book fell to the floor, while her temper rose as a whirlwind.

The eager flush on young Wendell's face deepened, and while a momentary flash of resentment leapt to his eyes, he did not change his attitude of profound respect. For a full minute Theo stood as still as a dainty piece of sculpture. The color slowly faded from her face, and her sweet blue eyes filled with tears of entreaty. As her lips parted in an effort to plead for her boy lover they trembled and revealed the lines of weakness in her sensitive face. Her speech was arrested, however, beneath Miss Flintof's scorching gaze. The girl had been trained to implicit obedience; she had learned long since not to measure her will with that of the spinster. But she was learning another lesson now—love was transforming her into an impassioned woman.

Miss Flintof towered over the girl, cruel and relentless, shaking her fist in Wendell's handsome face. "Leave my house!" she commanded. "Never again dare to seek Miss Reynolds. After she is graduated in June she shall be guarded by the solemn walls of a convent till she forgets that you ever lived! You plebeian, how dare you aspire to the hand of my niece!"

"Aunt Charlotte!" cried the girl, in heart-broken accents.

"Hold your tongue!" screamed Miss Flintof in a high key. "Say one word in this interloper's defense, and he shall not escape from this house with whole bones!"

Theo trembled and cowered, her timid nature



shrinking from the aggressive onslaught. She hung her head as a storm beaten flower. Her troubled face grew whiter and whiter with every malediction hurled at her debonair lover.

Miss Flintof's warlike manœuvres had thrown her hat awry, and its profusion of somber tips danced in hostile warning. With every nod of her head her frizzled hair became more and more dishevelled. Wendell indulged in a low, derisive laugh. Theo, with a moan of anguish, sank on a chair. The laugh did not soothe Miss Flintof's nerves.

"Laugh, you cur!" she said. "Your presumption is unequalled. Miss Reynolds can trace her lineage back to crowned heads. South Carolina old school aristocracy is world renowned. We glory in the pride of our forefathers, and scorn modern democracy. Begone, sir! I am confident that you don't know who your grandsire was. Perhaps you purchased the house next door to be near my niece?"

"I did, ma'am," replied Wendell bluntly; "knowing that I should be your neighbor, also. But a man can endure hell for a while in order to attain heaven." He then turned to Theo, dropped on one knee before her, and caught her clasped hands in his. "Dear Theo," he said, his voice softening. Then he whispered some comforting words to her. He did not observe that Miss Flintof was edging toward him until she laid a strong, fierce hand on the back of Theo's chair. She gave it a vigorous whirl and shove, which sent Theo rolling far from her persistent



wooer; and he was left kneeling before his glaring enemy.

"I defy you to utter one word more to my niece, sir!" she hissed, drawing herself up with folded arms. She seemed to dilate in her fury until, to Theo's excited mind, the spinster seemed enveloped in a lurid cloud.

Wendell arose from his kneeling posture, and reached for his hat, which he had tossed carelessly upon the family Bible. He gazed steadfastly into Miss Flintof's fiery orbs as he spoke. "I cannot forget that you, unfortunately, are the relative of my affianced wife, and for her sake I will temporize. But if you were a man I should be compelled to—strike you."

"Strike!" sneered the spinster; "it will be the only notable hit you will ever make in life."



## CHAPTER VIII

## BONNY CECIL.

Theo returned to her studies at school with an expression of pensive sadness, not unmixed with satisfaction, on her pretty face. Her last vacation at home had materially changed her. As a result of Miss Flintof's oppressive rule against man in general, and Theo's lover in particular, the girl had resorted to duplicity. Her clandestine meetings with Wendell, the tender missives which she carried in her bosom, the hurried whispers, the stolen caresses—all of these seemed the more precious since they had been forbidden her.

Wendell was her ideal of a romantic, chivalrous, determined lover. His reckless disregard of consequences in his efforts to be beside her, filled her at once with apprehension and joy. At midnight he would watch her window from his balcony, waiting patiently until her little hand stole out from behind the lattice to wave him a good-night. When she went out with her aunt the young man was sure to be somewhere near by, notwithstanding Miss Flintof's commands for him to keep at a distance. When the irate spinster frowned on him in stormy indignation, he retaliated with a courteous bow, executed in graceful defiance. He knew that Miss Flintof



assiduously watched the daily mails, to stop any communication between the lovers; but his letters continued to reach Theo through those mysterious channels which love, when stimulated by opposition, is sure to erode.

"It will not be long, my girlie," he said to Theo, in one of these missives; "my prospects are good. My recent connection with the old established law firm of Bently & Bently gives me prestige, and an opportunity to make the dear little girl who is to become my wife proud of me."

And the handsome young lawyer bent all his energies toward carving out a career for himself. His spontaneous nature and boyish enthusiasm won him many a success, where an older head, more likely to take account of obstacles, would have failed. Young as he was, he was much sought after; but he eluded the enticements of the social net, much to the disappointment of many a fair girl and scheming matron. He had but one object, one woman in mind, and for these he planned and worked with an unvarying singleness of purpose.

Cecil Dupree, Theo's college chum and roommate, was mystified by her companion's altered demeanor. Heretofore the two had confided in each other with girlish abandon, loyally sharing each other's smiles and tears. Never a spirit of rivalry had cast a shadow over their happiness. But bosom friends as they were, their natures were as antipodal as summer and winter. Theo, like the mass of girls, displayed sentimental defects. Cecil flouted the subject of love and matrimony, carrying herself with the independent



poise that marks the girl who is determined to make her own way in the world. She had known poverty, and to an unusual degree realized the necessity of taking advantage of her opportunities. Studious and ambitious, with a rare earnestness of purpose, she headed her classes in school, and carried the chief honors for the coming commencement. She was good to look upon, well educated, sensible, and possessed of that pride which enabled her to know her own worth, and which filled her with a desire to be active in life's battle.

When the last evening at the seminary came the two young girls went to their room at an early hour. Cecil, plump and petite, stood before the mirror and released the coil of her heavy hair, which glowed almost red in the gas light. Theo wistfully regarded the peaceful night from the window. She was dreaming of her lover, and wondering how best to tell her friend about him, and his plans for the immediate future. Convent walls forsooth! An innocent smile parted Theo's lips, and her sensitive face changed with every emotion.

"Moonstruck, Theo?" inquired Cecil merrily. "It seems to me you've been living in an atmosphere of delicious mystery and dreamy silence long enough. What does it all mean? Wake up, girlie. I've been planning out a splendid future for us. Theo, we must make a success of our careers. Oh, I'm just running over with ambition!"

Theo pulled nervously at the curtain, then looked helplessly at her friend.



"Wherever Fate may lead us, Theo," continued Cecil, "we'll not live the humdrum lives of the mass of women, who are bound by the chain of servility. Eh, dearest?"

"What chains?" inquired Theo guiltily.

"Matrimonial chains, of course. We haven't the superstitious dread of being old maids, which drives so many talented women into bondage. In my vocabulary lovers and idiots are synonymous words and marriage is suicide. Who can tell how many women might have amounted to something if they hadn't in youth promised to 'serve and obey'?"

Theo clasped her delicate hands, while a tear trembled on her lashes. Slowly approaching her friend, Theo put her arms about Cecil, and turned away her blushing face.

"I'm going to confide a secret to you, Cecil," she said, "the only one I've ever kept from you. Forgive me, will you?"

"Why, Theo!" exclaimed Cecil, "what can you mean? Surely nothing important has happened, or you would have told me long ago."

"Yes, something of vital importance has happened—the event of my life." Theo hid her face, and seemed unable to proceed.

"Well, well, do tell me about it!" cried Cecil, shaking her friend affectionately, then kissing the little shell-like ear. "Suspense and curiosity are consuming me. Out with it, you little freak. Have you found your fairy prince, and are you going to exhibit him on this, your entrance into the busy world? Who is he? What is he like?"

Encouraged by the interest she had awakened,



Theo raised her head, and looked steadfastly into her friend's eyes. "What an elegant guess!" she cried. "Yes, I have found my prince in the person of Rupert Wendell, who worships me; and his most ardent wish is for our speedy union."

Cecil drew a quick breath, and stared at Theo. "Prodigious absurdity!" she sneered, then laughed heartily.

"Cecil, I was never more in earnest in my life. My reason for not sooner confiding this darling secret is that I feared you would disapprove or ridicule me."

"Both of which I now heartily do!" spoke Cecil with vehemence, and an air of severe dignity. "For goodness sake, don't do anything so silly, I implore you. Wait at least ten years before you think of putting the yoke on your neck."

"Cecil, I appreciate your kindly interest, but you don't understand. Marriage is the crown of every woman's existence. It is a God-given institution." Theo gained courage by utterance, and her voice rang out fresh and triumphant with its own conviction. She looked at Cecil with eyes alight, and her cheeks glowing. Her absolute confidence in what she was saying irritated Cecil, who, with an impatient gesture exclaimed:

"Come back to earth, Theo, you poor misguided, lovesick soul, and explain your farcical idea of happiness."

"There is no explanation for the laws of nature, Cecil, more than our common sense can grasp. Marriage—the fulfilment of love! Ah, Cecil, is there anything more wonderful, more



beautiful than being ever in the arms of the man you adore?"

"Steady there! Hold on to yourself!" cried Cecil, her eyes sparkling with amusement over a feeling that was totally incomprehensible to her. She was disappointed that her friend could indulge in what seemed to her a cheap sentimentalism, and she was hurt to find that she was no longer first in Theo's affections. Gentle Theo had loved Cecil with an undivided devotion, and had shadowed every footstep of her chum while at school.

"I hope that the love which has come to you will bring you no regret," said Cecil coldly. "As for me, I shall crave no more than contentment—it is the philosophy of living. I have decided upon a life of celibacy, and I had fondly hoped that you—Oh, Theo, you have made the mistake of your life!" She turned away, her usual firmness forsaking her.



## CHAPTER IX.

## AN IMITATIVE WOOER.

Miss Flintof flitted from room to room in her orderly home. The spring housecleaning had been completed, and the renovated carpets and furniture were primly returned to their places. Theo's apartment had been modernized and refitted in dainty white and gold. It lacked nothing that taste and comfort could suggest. Miss Flintof was taking great pleasure in preparing for her niece's home coming. All of the sentiment of her nature, so long crushed out, had rushed back upon her heart, and centered itself in Theo, and she loved the girl with passionate selfishness. There was nothing she would not have done for Theo, short of sharing the smallest portion of her affection with anyone else.

"She is enough to fill my life—why should not I be sufficient for her?" reasoned the spinster, as she touched the draperies here and there, and arranged the fresh flowers in their vases.

Miss Flintof was planning a summer vacation with her niece in the White Mountains. She had selected an out-of-the-way refuge where there were few chances for a girl to meet would-be wooers. The girl should have plenty of innocent diversion in her aunt's company; and she



would learn to forget the folly of a summer's day.

The placidity of Miss Flintof's mind would have been considerably disturbed could she have known that Theo had stepped from the graduating platform into a closed carriage, and that Rupert Wendell, leaping in after the girl, had hastily ordered the cabman to drive to a well-known church on the outskirts of the town. There Theo became the wife of the man she loved.

Mrs. Rupert Wendell perhaps should have heaved one little sigh for Cecil's loveless life, and one for Miss Flintof's disappointment and desolation, but within her superabundantly happy heart there was no room for a sigh. On the day after her marriage she crossed the threshold of her new home with emotions of excessive rapture. In proud triumph Wendell lead her through the house, in the arrangement of which he had tried to anticipate every wish of his wife. Leaning confidently on Rupert's arm, her childish face aglow, Theo was extravagant in her expressions of praise and gratitude.

Young Wendell gazed tenderly into the girl's blue eyes, as if loath to lose one fleeting expression in their soft depths. "Oh, sweetheart!" he whispered, "you are my heaven of love, rest and home!"

The girl nestled closer to him, and sentimental tears filled her eyes. "Will you always feel this way toward me, Rupert dear?" she asked, with a little quiver in her voice.

"Always, my darling! Life shall be one happy summer's dream for us; and you shall be the



queen ever to reign over our domain of happiness."

What more satisfying answer could any woman ask? These commonplace utterances, which have passed between lovers from time immemorial, filled Theo with peace, and she closed her eyes contentedly. What use to conjure up the bugaboos of every day practical life, which might intrude upon the future, when so much joy was to be had in the present?

And as to Wendell—well, he was but a man, and he possessed the one living bit of humanity he desired.

"William," he called to the colored butler, "here are the keys. Take charge, and remember that your mistress is to have no annoyance whatever. Consult her wishes in all matters, receive her orders, and see that they are obeyed."

"Yes, sar—zactly," responded William, as he bowed and scraped. "De little misses shall not be boddered with nuttin, kase I'se gwine to carry tings along bedout a hitch—I is." He glanced slyly at the lovers from the corner of his eye, and the suspicion of a smile lurked around his African lips.

"I 'clar to God, Miss Mary," he chuckled, joining the cook a few minutes later, "dem people in de house ain't 'shame to hug up right 'fo' me. I bet Mars Ruput will stop walk 'bout in de nlight now fo' a w'ile."

"Go way, chil'!" replied Mary. "Mars Rup' wouldn't make lub befo' a nigger like you."

"Dat's zactly wa he did! An' you need n' put on airs kase you's got a little white blood. Hear



'bout de cuttin' scrape las' night?" he asked, abruptly changing the subject.

"No; wa 'bout it?" Mary opened her sleepy eyes in pleasant anticipation of the latest bit of gossip.

"Well, dar was a free ball up town, an' you know dem alley 'oomans is de debil. Las' night a yallar gal try to take 'way a black 'ooman's man fum her; an' de black 'ooman git a razor outer her stockin' an' slice up de yaller gal. Den de screamin' 'track de 'tention of de police, an' dey come an' pull de crowd. I 'scape t'rough de window, or I would be a squattin' down in de lockup now, kase I gots no money to pay me out. I lose my las' dime a shootin' craps. Is you got any cash, honey?" William sidled up to Mary, and attempted to put his arm about her; but she checked him, brandishing a frying pan over his head.

"No 'ooman should encourage anoder 'ooman's man," she said sagely, "less'n de owner of dat man is out o' sight; kase it's boun' to make sturvance."

"Dat's so," exclaimed William, as he patted her shoulder, "a man or 'ooman eider mus' know w'ar dey husban' or wife is locate 'fo dem go a matin' wid wa don' b'longs to dem. Miss Mary, you's a honey gal—you know w'at's w'at." Then he lowered his voice. "Da'lin,' I likes you, I sutainly does. De bu'ds is a lubin' in de trees, de buckra is a lubin' in de house. Let's you an' me j'in up, an' git in de game. Wa say, honey gal?"

Although previously rejecting his caresses, Mary now weakened. Her mouth broadened in



a coquettish grin. "You shet you mouf," she said, in a tone that belied her words.

William needed no stronger hint, and their ponderous lips met in a succession of explosive smacks, which resounded throughout the kitchen.

Suddenly William paused and listened. "Dar's de call bell," he said; "I gots to lef you, honey."

The first rapturous days of the Wendell honeymoon were more like a dream than reality to the lovers. They counted the moments when they were apart, and seemed unable to fully express the ecstasy of their hearts when together. After Wendell had started for his office in the morning, the butler was kept busy answering the doorbell, and receiving for his mistress gifts bought by her husband on his way down town—expensive bits of bric-a-brac, a piece of rare old china, books, music or flowers. They were usually accompanied by a tender missive full of the soft nothings which delight lovers.

As the day drew to a close, and shifting sunbeams made airy shadows of the leaves, while countless mocking birds trilled their evening song to their mates, Theo would wait and listen in the shadow of the honeysuckle vine—listen for the one step that could make her heart beat faster, and deepen the color in her delicately tinted cheeks. Sometimes she would sit at the piano, softly singing some of Wendell's favorite songs. Again she would occupy one of the two wicker chairs drawn into a cozy corner, trying to imagine that Wendell sat beside her.



"Oh, dear, how long the time seems!" she would whisper, "surely he must come soon!"

Presently the familiar step on the pavement, the click of the gate latch would be heard, and the lovers would fly to each other's arms, there to cling together in a lingering embrace.

"My precious love, my wee wifie, how long the day has been without you!" were Wendell's first words, as he held Theo's smiling face between his hands, and gazed into her lovelit eyes. Then in a shadowy alcove, where they could look out upon the darkening garden, they would sit together, forgetful of everything save the bond between them.

"This is our Eden!" whispered Theo one evening, as her head lay upon her husband's shoulder, and his face nestled down to hers, with all the warmth of his passion.

"Yes, love," he answered, "but there never will be a serpent to enter our Eden, and mar our paradise. We'll always belong to each other—we'll be lovers even in our old age. Say that we shall—won't you, Theo?"

"Yes, we'll always be lovers—always be true to each other. Tell me that no one else can ever take my place in your affections, hubby darling!"

"You will always be my heart's best and only love!" declared the young husband conclusively, crushing her in his arms.

The butler prudently knocked on the door before entering to announce dinner, and while in the dining room he stood behind his master's chair, possessed with bashfulness. He felt himself *de trop*, yet could not leave his post of duty.



When idle he rolled his eyes upward, riveting them on the ceiling, while his countenance expressed the piety of a Methodist circuit rider.

For the lovers the dinner hour was a continuation of smiles, languishing looks, and saccharine tête-à-tête. When it was over, and they had ordered the carriage, they sauntered from the room, arm in arm, billing and cooing as they went.

The butler, looking after them, indulged in a subdued chuckle.

"Wha' you shickerin' to yo'se'f fo', you fool nigger?" asked Mary.

"Ki-yi! Honey, you's knows 'bout dat later on. Mars and Misses goin' out to-night. Le' me hurry up an' git de kerridge, an' take dem to de hapra; den w'en I gits back, I'll sample dem wine an' ting, an' res' on de sofy a while. Dem's fine cigar wa' dar upstairs in de closic."

Bill carried a broad grin as he followed Mary to the kitchen. "Dey's started to go'ut an' I hopes dey'll keep it up, kase a feller can't enjoy no kint o' priv'lege w'en dey's a settin' roun' de house, tryin' to chaw one anoder mout' off all de time."

Bill proceeded to sample the good things as soon as the coast was clear. But in his haste he forgot to replace the stoppers in their respective bottles, and his taste for fine cigars and other luxuries hurried him in his operations, for he must accomplish all his purposes in time to attend his master and mistress upon their return with the grave dignity becoming a butler.

Bill could assume any manner he fancied, and



sometimes after the most treasonable offense. His look of piety, his extreme politeness and patient forbearance had always shifted his misdoings to some less innocent looking character.

As the night was clear and balmy, the Wendells had arranged to walk home. When they returned they stood for a while on the stoop, watching the mellow moon. The music and the romance of the evening's entertainment haunted their memories as a delicious dream, adding fuel to their sentimentalism. They had not been able to conceal their devotion to each other even as they sat in their box. It had been remarked with amusement by some of Rupert's bachelor friends, while spinsters and disappointed married women sighed and criticised.

Wendell drew his wife's face toward him, and was about to kiss her lips, when she drew back.

"Be careful—don't! Someone is passing!" she whispered. "Let us go in to our cozy corner."

"Yes, let us go quickly. I can hardly wait, my darling, for those lips. I haven't kissed them since—since we got out of the carriage."

They entered the house, and without turning on the lights, hurried arm in arm to the alcove. Theo was about to sink back into the chair with her arms about her husband's neck. But with an exclamation of fear she paused and clung to him.

"What is it, my angel? Are you ill?" cried Wendell, in alarm.

"A man!" screamed Theo, in terror.

The light was quickly turned on, and lo! There in the shrine of love sat Bill, the butler. Squeezed



into the chair beside him was Mary, the cook. Her head rested on his shoulder, and both slept serenely. William held a cigar, and on the floor beside him stood a half emptied goblet of brandy. His face wore a pleased expression of ease, his clumsy feet rested on a silken couch; and his whole attitude was that of a man in an advanced state of debauchery. His horror stricken spectators gazed at the pair in mute astonishment. With wonderful self-control Wendell led his wife from the room. Then he returned to the Bacchanalian, seized him by the collar, dragged him to the open window, and with violence hurled him into the garden.

The scuffle aroused Mary, and with a scream she disappeared toward the servants' quarters. Bill's head struck the cemented walk with some force, but he slumbered on, and dreamed that he had rolled from his bed. The bright rays of the early sun scarcely disturbed his rest, but at his usual hour for rising he scratched his head and looked about him.

"Whar I is, anyhow?" he soliloquized. "De jew got me all wet up. I spec I drap to sleep las' night out yer in de flowers yad. Good Lo'd!" he exclaimed, suddenly remembering. Without more ado he gathered his belongings, and wisely forsook the premises, omitting to serve notice. Mary was also among the missing that morning, but Dinah, her mother, came to apologize for her daughter's offense.

"Dat debil Bill is de ruin of dat gal," she declared, "he bin a bunk up to Mary fer de longest time. But he's too recklisome fer I to manage.



I done run him from us house, an' he come back dar de oder night in de rain, wid a ile skin ober his head. He peep t'rough de crack, and call 'Mary' saftly. Boss, I bin so vex I take de skillet o' b'ilin' water, an' t'row it t'rough de window on him. I bet you he gone back home a leapin'! But yer is her si' Patsy. Patsy, don't you ack like no fool. Stan' up an' tell de lady dat you wan' Mary's place!"

Patsy stood with folded arms and a vacant stare, as if unconscious of having been addressed.

"Aunty, can Patsy cook?" asked the master, uneasily.

"Yas, sar—she's a pious gal!" answered Dinah emphatically, as if sure that the piety would serve as a sufficient recommendation for her daughter's cookery. "She's a quiet gal—she don' make no n'ise. Same like you see her, she stan' dat way all de time. Now, Mary, she got de swif'ness o' de fambly."

Much as this naive reply amused Wendell he was filled with dismay.

"She'll never do, Dinah. Can you cook?"

"Oh, yas sar," was the ready reply, with a low courtesy. "I's a natu'al born cook. An' if you'll please, boss, don' put my darter on de chain dis time, I'll pray God to bress you. I tells you, it's all de fault o' dat black nigger, Bill."

Dinah was installed. But when Theo timidly tried to excuse Mary's misdemeanor, her husband stopped her with a kiss. "Don't let such lips as yours plead for the shameless wench. Mary's offense is beyond pardon. Come, those biscuits look very tempting. Butter one for your



hubby. It will be nicer if touched by your dear little hands."

Theo smiled as she sliced the biscuit open; but a startled look came into her eyes, and suddenly she dropped the knife.

"Did you cut your precious finger?" Wendell reached for her hand as he spoke.

"No, oh no," replied Theo, blushing painfully, and trying to conceal the biscuit.

"Let me see," Wendell persisted, drawing her hand toward him. Knowing no will of her own, Theo again opened the biscuit. There was a moment's silence in which her husband bit his lip ferociously to smother an unholy benediction upon Dinah, for snugly embedded in the snowy lining was a kinky tress of hair. Wendell sent a pre-emptory message to the kitchen, and Dinah appeared, with drooping jaw and ashen color.

"I 'clar, Mars Ruput, I's vex wid myself fer sich a norful naxident. While I was waitin' fer de stove to git hot, I says to myself, says I, 'Comb your head, ol' gal,' an' it was den dat patch o' wool must bin shed off in de flour. My eyesight is gittin' bad, but de nex' time I went to de shop I's a gwine to buy me a green spectacle. Please, boss, 'scuse me fo' dis time, an' I'll neber comb my head again; an' nuttin' wrong shan't neber happen, or I hope dat God might neber le' me si' down roun' de t'rone on high wid dem ol' patria'ch Abra'um, an' sech like."

Dinah worked diligently to serve the meals in a high state of perfection during the days that followed; but, sad to relate, a calamity as shocking as that of the biscuit at length befell the



tureen of soup, which "naxident" caused the discharge of the cook, and threw the young people upon their own resources, leaving them in a helpless state of perplexity.



## CHAPTER X.

## THE SCOGGINS'.

Cecil Dupree prepared to enter earnestly upon the humdrum duties of pedagogy. Her young energies and ambitions were demanding an outlet, and she seized upon the first opportunity for action. The charm of novelty possessed her as she stepped onto the train, bound for a little station in a remote farming region. She had been born and brought up in the city, but had always craved the freedom and the wholesome sweetness of country life. And now she was to have her fill of it. She had procured a position as teacher of a country school at Pine Station, and was to take up the work at once.

The girl smiled joyously as giant oaks, waving fields of grain, green meadows, tumultuous brooks, flower gardens and cosy country homes whirled past the coach windows, in variegated panorama. She meant to put herself on a common footing with the simple, honest farmer folk among whom her lot was to be cast. She would try to understand their life and ways, and to establish a bond of sympathy between them and herself. She pictured them in her mind with rosy, smiling faces, pursuing their rural occupations among fields of plenty, and bowers of greenery.



But as the train penetrated further and further into the country the landscape grew less lovely. Sun-scorched fields, with scarcely a tree to break their monotony, stretched far and wide, and "Pine Station" lay among the most desolate surroundings. As Cecil stepped from the train she was met by an uncouth farmer, who accosted her bluntly.

"I'm John Scoggins. Be you the new school-misses?" He touched the brim of his heavy felt hat, and stood in awkward expectation.

Cecil's cheeks flushed, and involuntarily she drew back. Then, bravely smothering her repugnance, she greeted Mr. Scoggins courteously. He assisted her to mount his high Jersey wagon for a drive of sixteen miles through a barren looking country in the wilds of North Carolina.

Scoggins filled his mouth with tobacco, flourished his whip, and in a loud voice called to his mule, "Git 'lang, Ben Tilman!"

"South Carolina name," observed Cecil.

"Yah, but this critter is named fo' the ol' stock, afo' they got to be somebody. Ben h'isted 'em up to glory. His daddy an' mine was contemptousarier—they plowed side by side barefoot as long as they lived."

Silence fell for a space; then Cecil ventured, "Is the farm far from here?"

"Right sma't of a ride," replied Scoggins, spitting clear of the wheel. "My fa'm is only a mile from Campville. It's thar the 'ristocrats is settled; an' bein' you's a fine lady, Miss Dupree, likely they'll take to you. An' ef the fa'm is too lonesome fo' you, why go thar. Betty Robins—



she 'twas Betty Miller—keeps a pow'ful big hotel. The village folks is a proud and stuck up set, sho's you live. They owned niggers afo' the war, and they's too proud to work yit; so they set back hongry, and brag 'bout what tha' dad-dies done, an' who they's kin to now. Thar's a 'Piscopal meetin' house in the village, but tha's no religion in it, you bet. It 'lows anything in the line o' sin. 'Piscoloppians is got a conscience that can stretch like injun rubber. The pa'sin here is prouder than any of 'em; he struts 'roun' the street a flirtin' slyly with all the women folks, old an' young. The old maids in Campville is gone plumb crazy a'ter 'im. Of a Sunday he trigs hissself out in a long white shroud, an' preaches thar ain't no hell fire."

"I fear that you do not understand the Episcopal service," said Cecil. "Join the people in their worship and you will find it comforting and instructive."

"Not much!" cried Scoggins. "I ain't got no desire to set in the seats of the sco'nful. Them worldly minded pa'sins is got the swellhead; they git up an' decla' God gi'n 'em power to fo'-give sin. Did you ever hear tell o' sech a thing?"

Cecil had that estimable virtue, sympathy, for those less fortunate than herself; she patiently tried to show the illiterate man the error of his judgment, and the evil of prejudice. But Mr. Scoggins affirmed that he believed in a religion not subject to the changes of fashion.

A turn in the road brought the travelers in sight of the Scoggins farm. Cultivated fields could be seen on every side; the sunlight glim-



mered on waving grain in the fullness of harvest time, mellowing the rich gold tints. The rambling farmhouse, built of solid logs, was surrounded by pine trees. In the rear was an immense barnyard, noisy with the clucking and crowing of its feathered occupants, as they gathered about the open doors of a mammoth barn. A pigpen and a smokehouse were in sight, while an old-fashioned well and horse trough occupied a conspicuous position in the front yard.

Cecil gazed in wonder at the rustic scene. She saw the great, clumsy cows slowly pass through the open bars, the leader's bell jingling to her measured tread. A sun-browned farmhand led his yoke of oxen to water. While he waited at the trough he drew his brogans from his sockless feet, and knocked the sand out of the clumsy shoes.

True to the spirit of rural hospitality, the Scoggins family stood about the front door awaiting the arrival. As the wagon drew up they gazed at Cecil in motionless silence. Presently two of the youngsters, in juvenile excitement at the idea of meeting a stranger, darted wildly from the road into the kitchen and back again. They were freshly frocked, and their straw-colored locks had been oiled and plastered for the occasion.

"Wall, we're to hum," said Scoggins.

Cecil clambered down from her elevated perch.

"Ma," said Scoggins, "this is the new school misses. I didn't speck to see such a young gal."

"Come right in," cried Mrs. Scoggins, de-



lightedly. "We uns is glad to see you. What mo't be yo' name?"

"Miss Dupree."

"That sounds too offish. What mo't be yo' fust name?"

"Cecil," replied the girl, with a subdued sigh. She did not crave intimacy. And she expected that she was to have been the one to make the first advances.

"Wall, Miss Cecil, come right in an' make yo'self to hum. Them's my daughters—Ma'y Ann, Rose, an' 'Lizabeth. This leetle boy is Bud, an' this un is Jeemes; but he don't answer to Jeemes—you must call him 'Bully.' His pa nick-named him Bully 'cause he's sech a fighter. Come, boys, don't dodge 'bout; shake hands with yo' teacher. Pull yo' hat foo Miss Cecil."

In dismay poor Cecil looked at the mother, and then at the daughters and sons. And as she reviewed the family her spirits dropped to zero. Her fancy had anticipated pastoral beauty and picturesque people. But here was the reality. Mrs. Scoggins' lank form was clad in a skimpy calico skirt and tight basque; her yellowish hair was frizzed, and from its odor was evidently scorched by a curling iron; her upper lip was short, her gums blue, her teeth imperfect. Rose and Elizabeth, although having a certain comeliness of youth, resembled their mother, while Mary Ann bore the flesh of the family.

The evening meal being ready, Cecil followed her hostess into the kitchen, where she was introduced to several men who labored on the turpentine tract. The girl never forgot the crude



bounty of that supper. The unique centerpiece on the table was a gigantic gourd filled with curd, floating in delicious cream. At each plate was a small tin can-top. What it was intended for Cecil could not imagine, but while she was trying to solve the problem the butter was handed to her, and she placed some of it on the tin disc.

"Why, honey," exclaimed Mrs. Scoggins, "that ain't fo' butter."

"Pardon me, please," Cecil replied in confusion; "I thought it was intended for that purpose."

"No, no," laughed Mrs. Scoggins; "when you pour your coffee in the saucer to cool it, you must put the hot cup in the can-top, so that it won't stick to the ilecloth."

"Ah," said Cecil good-naturedly, "I didn't know that."

"I thought teachers knowed eve'ything," interposed the host. But he saw the flash of the girl's eyes, and fearing that he had offended, he said placatingly: "He'p yo'self to sqerril, Miss Dupree; an' have some b'iled onions; they sets handy to you."

Cecil observed closely, and tried to conform to the farm table etiquette. But the lack of refinement repelled her, and she suffered great depression of spirit.

After supper, when the evening chores were finished, the family adjourned to the veranda, and seated themselves in the stiff cowhide chairs. Mrs. Scoggins was very friendly toward Cecil. She pressed the girl to take a dip of snuff, and then asked her countless questions, more or less



personal and intimate. The Scoggins girls sat like mutes, making "sheep eyes" at the men, who stalked out, one after another, in their hickory striped shirtsleeves.

Cecil longed for the hour when she could say good-night, and go to her room. She wished to be alone, and to consider her plans for the future. She must struggle with herself, overcome her feelings of disappointment, and try to adapt herself to circumstances.

When the clock struck nine, Mrs. Scoggins arose. "Miss Cecil," she said, "you will sleep in the shed room with Ma'y Ann—jist the two of you. We moved out Rose an' Lizabeth's bed 'smornin'."

At this distressing information Cecil bit her lip and gave the speaker a marble look. "Impossible!" she said to herself, and then gazed appealingly at her ponderous bedfellow, who was lighting a smoky hand lamp.

"Come right on, Miss Cecil," called Mrs. Scoggins, leading the way.

When in the cheerless apartment Cecil saw no kind of accommodations, and inquired for the bathroom.

"Sakes alive!" exclaimed the hostess, "that sort o' things b'longs to rich folks. But you'll find the foot tub and wash basin out on the back porch, an' the comb on the mantel shelf in my room. I allays keep eva'thing handy."

"Thank you," replied Cecil, in a voice from which all joy had flown; "I have my toilet articles with me."

"Well, good-night. We have breakfast by



candle light afo' the girls go to the cowp'n, so that the men folks can git to work early. They has a pow'ful long ways to go to the tuppentine 'oods."

The night passed wearily for Cecil, as she lay beside the hot, fleshy form of Mary Ann, whose breath was a strange commingling of snuff and onions. Vainly Cecil struggled with what she feared was false pride. She told herself that the training of these illiterate human beings was more important than her own personal comfort; that in this isolated region she had found a vineyard for philanthropic deeds; that she would find her compensation when she had made cultured men and women of crude boys and girls. She prayed for strength to persevere; but again the day's experience arose before her vision.

"I must—I will control myself," she finally resolved, "or I cannot hope to control others. But I cannot live here. I will move to the village tomorrow." Then, despite Mary Ann's noisy slumbers, the weary girl dropped to sleep.

Before the first flush of dawn Cecil was disturbed by the tumultuous blast of a horn.

"Merciful heaven!" she cried, "what can it be?"

"It's the gittin' up ho'n," giggled Mary Ann. "It's time to dress fo' breakfast. But wait tell I strike a light." The big girl bounced out of bed, and was soon throwing on her garments. When half dressed, with shoes in her hand, she sallied forth to the porch, there to perform the exercises of the bathroom.

"Will you kindly bring me a basin of water,



Miss Scoggins?" asked Cecil, in tones of genuine distress.

"All right, ma'arm; but you can't git the towel 'thout you come to it, 'cause it's on the roller, an' ma won't let nobody take it down."

"Never mind about ma and the towel," rejoined Cecil, with a shiver of disgust, for she had memories of a dirty rag suspended from the wall and used by the entire family, farm hands included.

Very soon Mary Ann returned, bearing a small tin basin of water and a piece of homemade soap, both of which she placed on a clothes chest. Then she timidly proceeded to admire Cecil's toilet case.

"You got a true—true teeth bresh, eh, Miss Cecil? I allays scrubs my teeth with a snuff bresh. Le' me try yo'nt. I neva did try a store bought un."

"No, indeed!" cried Cecil. Then she checked herself, for Mary Ann had dipped the brush in the basin of water, and was scrubbing away on her teeth.

"You may have it for your own, Miss Scoggins. I have another one," said Cecil pleasantly, suppressing a smile.



## CHAPTER XI.

JACK SANDERS.

Campville is situated at an altitude of four hundred feet, among the pine-clad hills of North Carolina. Its distinguishing characteristics are its extreme isolation and its healthful climate. The air has a stimulating freshness, and is freighted with the aromatic smell of the pines. Malaria is unknown, and pulmonary troubles are supposed to be impossible in this region. The winters are similar to those of Southern France or Northern Italy. The place is occasionally patronized by tourists in search of health or utter seclusion. Campville has one long, narrow street, a few residences built on either side, a postoffice, two stores, and a county schoolhouse situated on the outskirts. In the peaceful stillness of an antiquated graveyard, overshadowed by somber trees, stands a time-worn chapel. Its lofty, old-fashioned pulpit, square pews and dingy walls have registered the flight of nearly two centuries.

The "Robbins House," recommended by Mr. Scoggins, proved to be a typical country boarding house, which gave Campville quite an air of distinction. Among the villagers it was an un-failing topic for conversation, and a cud for scan-



dal mongers. An arrival there created a sensation throughout the community.

Cecil made her home in the Robbins House, and at once took up her work in the midst of the crude townspeople, at a small salary. She intended to begin at what she judged to be the foundation of successful teaching, omitting a formidable code of rules and regulations. Inexperienced as she was, she still depended on her feminine intuition to understand the strange assortment of human beings who would be under her tutelage, and to guide her aright in her efforts to awaken these creatures from their lethargy of indifference and ignorance.

When the girl first entered the rustic school-house she gazed upon her pupils in astonishment. The speech of kindly encouragement with which she had intended to greet them, as a class of children, was clearly inappropriate, for many of the twenty-eight assembled were adults.

"Good-morning," called the teacher cheerily, as she paused upon the threshold. "I am glad to see all of you here on time."

"We all been yeah sence fust sun up," replied one tall girl, less bashful than the others. For in remote country places the patrons of schools imagine that their children are neglected if they do not insist upon their spending the entire day in school.

Cecil at once went to her desk and surveyed her pupils pleasantly. A crowd of robust and sturdy lads and lassies they were, save for a few pallid clay eaters. Many of them had never worn a shoe, but displayed huge bare feet, every toe



standing apart in gigantic development. On each side of the walls, dinner pails were suspended from nails. Sunbonnets were heaped on a table, and an armful of hickory switches were placed in an orderly bunch on the teacher's desk.

The pupils sat in profound silence, gaping in wonder at Miss Dupree. There was an awkward pause, during which they simultaneously wrung their fingers, or cracked their knuckles. The children of the village, neat and trim, gathered around the teacher, and to emphasize their superiority they tittered, or cast disdainful glances at their country cousins.

Cecil commenced by examining the books previously used by the scholars. She found nothing more ambitious than Webster's "blue book" and Carpenter's spelling books. Mary Ann Scoggins, who posed among her compeers as a sophomore, sat apart wrestling with the long words in "Peter Parley's History."

"These books are absolutely worthless," said the teacher earnestly, "we must have others."

"Can't," spoke Jack Sanders, the "terror" of the school. "Pa says them's done paid fo', an' ef we l'a'n all what's in 'em we'll know 'nough."

At this a double-jointed fellow, with red hair and countless freckles, arose and offered his advice. "Please, ma'arm, don't listen to nothin' Jack Sanders is got to say. He's allays run our other schools 'cordin' to his own likin', but please gracious, he ain't a goin' to run this un—not ef Tom Ellis is in it."

"Silence!" called the teacher.

"I'll fix yo' fo' that, Tom Ellis, you speckled



face wata'melon t'ief!" came from Jack Sanders' corner of the room.

Then Nancy Davis, a matronly looking girl of serene countenance and pale eyes, began to explain in a squeaky voice the cause of hostilities. "T'other teacher we had was a citimun," she said, "an' he had sech a knock-down an' drag out time with the scholars that he swa' he wouldn't keep school here no mo', 'thout he toted a brace o' pistols. An' he usen to take his'n out, an' lay it on his desk afo' he started to keep school o' mornins."

"But he was skeered o' Jack Sanders," shouted "Bully" Scoggins, from his perch in the chimney corner. "Jack Sanders licked all the teachers we ever had yit, but I bet he couldn't lick me."

"'Cause I was a lickin' post fo' them," began the accused; but, meeting the calm, steadfast eyes of his teacher, he ducked his head under his desk, in order to conceal the corncob pipe that he was smoking.

"Strong will, which will revolt against authority; and one that cannot be forced into obedience," was Cecil's mental comment.

"Jack Sanders and Sam Hopkins took our fust teacher by the legs, run 'im up the chimbly, an' cleaned it out with 'im," ventured a stolid looking maiden.

"When Pa'sin Newton was a preachin' a pow'ful good preach in this very schoolhouse on a Sunday, Jack Sanders rode a ox through, a mile a minute," piped a small boy.

"I kin tell you wuss than that," began still



another pupil. But a loud rap on the desk cut short the eager speakers.

"If there are any more charges against Mr. Sanders, kindly excuse me from hearing them," spoke the teacher, with severe dignity.

"Goodt!" cheered Jack Sanders, in a stage whisper, as he snapped his fingers in the face of one complainant, and threw spitballs at the others.

With determination and a genial smile Cecil, although somewhat dismayed, began her duties.



## CHAPTER XII.

## THE SPINSTER IS RECONCILED.

The Wendells' housekeeping proved a complication of petty disasters to Rupert; and for his inexperienced wife a daily routine of trials. The young man marveled at Theo's unlimited forbearance, her wonderful tact, and the gentle grace with which she handled almost impossible situations. He pronounced her an angel, and himself a reprobate reclaimed by her celestial influence. But he did not fully realize how many hardships she assumed in order to spare him the worry and annoyance caused by the misdoings of servants, until some startling occurrence brought him to a full knowledge of her sacrifices. Then he decided that he and his wife would take their meals at the Windsor Hotel, which was directly across the street.

"Now, my pet, we will enjoy life," said Wendell. "Never again shall you be subjected to menial responsibilities. You are not very strong, and you must be cared for tenderly."

"Ah, but shall we not yearn for the privacy of our happy hours at meal times, dearest?" protested Theo.

"Our joys shall never diminish, sweet one. Of course we shall miss the privileges we enjoyed



in our own dining room. I do so fully appreciate all that our home means to us. But wherever we may go, I shall always find my home in your presence, my own darling. In a faultless wife a man has everything he desires; and nothing should tempt him beyond the portals of his domestic paradise."

"I am not faultless, Rupert. But should the day ever come when we do discern faults in each other, let us help each other by correcting them, dear."

"I fear that my Theo would grow weary in the good work upon her hubby's many imperfections, while he would find none to correct in his wife."

"Ah, you know what I think about that!" cried Theo, throwing her arms about him.

"Well," he responded with a laugh, "I wish that Miss Flintof had as good an opinion of me as you have. It might reconcile matters, and that would please my little one."

"There is hope. Aunt Charlotte's last letter was not nearly so severe as usual. Oh, I know that she would forgive us if she could realize how much we love each other, and how happy we are together."

Rupert looked doubtful.

But, in fact, Miss Flintof was softening slightly. She had begun to miss Theo painfully; however, it was not easy for her, under the circumstances, to acknowledge this fact even to herself. At first she could not be reasoned with, nor comforted. Theo's daily visits, her streaming eyes, and attitude of sweet humility failed to thaw the spinster's icy front. She would listen to the peni-



tent's expressions of sorrow with scathing formality, taking note of the fact that Theo could not be induced to say one word of regret for having married Wendell. Theo bore it all patiently, for she remembered that the lonely woman had given her a mother's tender care; and while deprecating her aunt's eccentricity, she knew of the older woman's many noble, kindly acts among friends and neighbors during trouble or sickness. She knew that Miss Flintof's mouldy complexion, Roman nose and greenish, penetrating eyes were not an unwelcome sight among the town's wives; who, while they often resented in their hearts her officious habit of turning a searchlight on their husbands' morals, tolerated her for her better qualities and a certain irresistible native wit. And these wives knew, too, that the very thought of the spinster caused many a Benedict to hasten home, when tempted to linger elsewhere. Those who posed as model husbands and consistent churchmen could not afford to defy her rigid rules of propriety.

The estrangement between Miss Flintof and her niece had wounded the spinster more deeply than she had deemed possible, for her devotion to Theo was sincere. After long mental debate the unhappy woman resolved to pardon the offense in Theo; but in Wendell, "never—no, never!"

"That man shall not longer rejoice in this painful separation," declared Miss Flintof, as if to cover what might seem a weakening in the stand she had taken.

She felt pity, mingled with contempt, for the affectionate Theo as a wife, and she condemned



the very name of "honeymoon." When the legitimate length of time usually assigned to that period had passed, Miss Flintof became more gracious to her niece, tolerated her visits, and later encouraged them.

When Theo told her aunt that she and her husband intended to escape some of the difficulties of housekeeping by taking their meals at the Windsor, Miss Flintof pointed her bony finger and said bluntly:

"Don't do it; don't throw that fellow you have married in the way of temptation. He will make you rue it, mark what I say. Allow him no latitude. He has only good looks to commend him, but they are enough for those highfliers at the Windsor."

"Only good looks!" repeated Theo timidly. "Oh, Aunt Charlotte, if you only knew Rupert's worth! He is the noblest man living, and one that temptation could never——"

"Experience will come to you later," interrupted the spinster acridly, "and when it does, I will heap coals of fire on your head for your disobedience to my command. Leave me now, child; mocking memories of my own injuries are still bitter."

Theo did not understand the look of pain on her aunt's face. She did not know that she had innocently reopened a wound in a heart that had suffered from treachery and desertion. The young wife hurried away, distressed by what she conceived to be hard-heartedness. But when she told her husband of the incident she became more enlightened.



"Yes," drawled Wendell, "there is a reason for your aunt's severity in these matters. I've forgotten just how the story goes, but long ago a dashing young adventurer made love to her. They became engaged. In his fascinating way he confessed his poverty, and in her confiding love she endowed him with half of her fortune, 'to establish a business,' she said; and also to prepare for their honeymoon trip, which was to have been a tour into the East Indies. Miss Flintof made elaborate preparations for the approaching nuptials, and he purchased the wedding ring. She arrayed herself as became a blushing bride, donned the orange blossoms, and awaited her husband-elect. She is still waiting," he concluded, with mock solemnity, as a smile of enjoyment slowly overspread his face.

Theo raised her hands in horror. "What became of the groom?" she asked.

"He, with the coveted cash, took unto himself a young wife, proceeded on his wedding tour, and has never returned."

"Poor Aunt Charlotte!" groaned Theo. "Why, Rupert, how can you laugh at anything so distressing?"



## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE FRUGATZA.

The gaiety of the Windsor brought no added pleasure into Theo's life. At meal times she missed the atmosphere of home. The twilight hour, which had belonged to love's tryst, was given to the noisy babble of the hotel veranda. Wendell's active temperament and fun-loving disposition began to crave excitement. Proudly he presented his wife to his wide circle of friends. Invitations were extended—society opened its doors to the dainty beauty. Theo received these advances graciously, although she shrank from the scrutiny to which they subjected her. She longed for the retirement of her home, and the quiet happiness of its life, with no companionship save the all-satisfying presence of her husband.

Young Wendell's charm of manner and personal magnetism made him a great favorite in society, and many feminine wiles were used to draw him from the side of his young wife. Theo calmly watched her husband's increasing popularity, and the easy grace with which he filled the place of honor. She tried to rejoice in his triumphs, and she could not understand why they brought her no gratification. With a strange



feeling of unrest, she marveled at what seemed to her a lack of womanly dignity and reserve among unconventional society women. She was not in touch with their ambitions, nor the false pride and rivalry among them. She was wanting in that spirit of independence and liberty of action which appeal to men.

There was a bevy of young women at the hotel, among whom Wendell soon became indispensable. This Miss Flintof watched and speculated upon with secret satisfaction. A time would come when Wendell should rue the wrong he had done her. She often spent her evenings at the Windsor among the older women, while Wendell and his wife were induced to linger with the youthful merry-makers.

At length Theo's delicate health placed her in the unenviable position of "wallflower." She was entertained by ancient dames, who whispered behind their fans, while her husband was captured by some fresh, defiant damsel, or irresistible grass widow. Her heart questioned, "Will his love for me ever grow cold?" and her lips replied, "No, never!" But in the awakening of her jealous fears she felt herself powerless to eclipse her rivals; and however much she tried to temporize, her sweet eyes grew anxious, and her manner abstracted. The difference between her ideas of pleasure and those of her husband created mental confusion of right and wrong, and removed his life from hers. What to her seemed infidelity was to him lawful liberty, sanctioned by society; and that which barred her flow of happiness opened the sluices to his own.



This Miss Flintof's sharp eyes detected, and she fired menacing glances at the offending Wendell. But he was innocent of intentional wrong, and failed to understand. With meek forbearance Theo suffered long before her woman's heart cried out for relief.

Marcella Frugatza, a picturesque Italian beauty, who was divorced from her husband, lived at the Windsor. A woman of Bohemian habits, she scoffed at old school propriety, and acknowledged her admiration for Mrs. Wendell's husband. Diligently she tried to win him from her rivals among the girls, regardless of the agony she inflicted upon the sad-eyed wife. She declared that unmarried men had little attraction for her, and that the only man whose attention was worth winning was the one who inspired universal admiration.

Wendell seemed to be the last to understand that he was a favorite with this woman. In his courteous way he acknowledged her fascination, and was drawn to her side more frequently than he realized. Never having had cause to suffer the poignant pangs of jealousy, he failed to recognize the symptoms in others. When his wife's telltale face appealed to him, he would mentally assign a physical cause to her indisposition. With tender solicitude he would make love to her, and then, as a humming bird, pass on to another honey laden flower.

In a secluded corner of the hotel veranda, where the moonbeams filtered uncertainly through the vines, a hammock swung. It was Madam Frugatza's favorite retreat. She was an



adept in those small arts which attract and monopolize unsuspecting man; and Wendell was no exception to the rule. When Theo heard the Italian beauty in dulcet tones entice Wendell into the commodious receptacle for loungers, she was not surprised by his lack of resistance. The charitable wife laid the fault where she felt it belonged, and pronounced "dear Rupert" blameless.

"It is a favor seldom granted," said Madam Frugatza, in her slow rich tones, "but you are to be admitted for a twilight call each evening."

Wendell's reply was lost in the laughing voices around, but he took the charming woman's arm, and together they walked to the hammock, settling themselves snugly.

"Shameless viper, that Italian!" Miss Flintof scathingly remarked, as the couple passed her. "What is Wendell thinking of?"

"Me, of course!" smilingly replied the dauntless Marcella, glancing over her shoulder.

Miss Flintof bristled with fury, but the objects of her anger were now beyond her hearing.

Theo choked back a sob of bitterness as her eyes strayed to the hammock. As a nervous patient in a dentist's chair, she clutched the arms of the one in which she sat. "I must endure it—but how can I?" was her mental cry of pain.

Miss Flintof watched the forlorn Theo with a heart throb of sympathy. She understood the young wife's anguish, and her resolute nature longed for action. She arose and paced the veranda with soft, measured tread. Suddenly there was a jarring sound, a feminine scream, and



Madam Frugatza and Wendell found themselves in an undignified heap on the floor. In the sensation which followed they became unpleasantly conspicuous.

"Upon examination," said an animated observer, "it becomes evident that a ghost severed the hammock rope."

Miss Flintof stood by with a bland smile, enjoying the embarrassment of the victims of the episode. She averred that it was a judgment sent upon the shameless couple for their vulgar disregard of propriety. Shortly after this Wendell took his wife home.

"Proper place for them," mumbled Miss Flintof, as she walked to her own husbandless abode. Her prayer that night was that she might have divine assistance in checking wrong, to the advancement and reformation of the pagan world.

Another favorite pastime in which Madam Frugatza engaged Wendell's attention was at the gaming table. Many an evening the two sat apart from others, mingling their laughter with the click of ivory chips. The Madam, while distracting Wendell's attention from the game, never lost sight of her points, and invariably won. Miss Flintof condemned these proceedings as criminal, and Theo pleaded with her husband not to invite the evil influence of the gambling propensity. With a haughty smile on her sensual lips the Frugatza ignored Miss Flintof's protests, and she patted Theo's cheek patronizingly.

"You innocent little mouse!" she laughed. "There, there, don't trouble your small head about things you do not understand. Eric!"



raising her lustrous eyes and beckoning to one of her admirers, "take this child to the music room. Some one is singing from 'Robert.' She dotes on music! Five dollars, Sir Rupert! Ah, ha! You call? I win."

At such times Theo would blush, and endeavor to look severely at the woman; but one glance into the bold black orbs, and her own pure eyes became downcast, and the pink wave grew deeper as it lingered on her pale face.

Theo noted her husband's increasing intimacy with the defiant beauty, and the knowledge of it was agony untold. She gave herself to gloomy silence and bitter apprehension.

One evening when Wendell escorted his wife to the veranda, and then went to keep an engagement with Frugatzka, could he have seen the misery on his wife's face perhaps he would have retraced his steps. But he did not look back. Instead, he hurried forward, with masculine curiosity as to what the evening would bring forth in the company of the piquant madam, who drank tokay with the relish of a Hungarian, and consumed cocktails as naturally as other women drink tea; who rode horseback astride, clad in bloomers that showed off her finely developed form in a most pleasing manner to the masculine gaze.

With burning eyes Theo watched the stairway for her husband's return. Jealousy made tormenting suggestions to her mind, lengthening moments into an eternity before the object of her thoughts reappeared. He held Madam Fru-



gatza's arm familiarly, and lingered with her at the foot of the stairs.

"How very near his face is to hers! How Rupert smiles into her eyes as he listens to her words! What an elegantly developed form, what plump and shapely limbs! And he, my husband, admiring them! Oh, merciful God!" The frenzied wife arose from her chair, and unconsciously advanced a step toward Wendell and his companion. In extreme nervousness she twisted and wrung her scarf through fingers which had grown chill with suffering. She tried to call out—to speak the words, "Rupert, husband!" But her trembling voice was unheard in the chatter of those around her. Her throat became dry with a choking sensation.

Miss Flintof approached, and saw her niece's despairing attitude. "Are you ill, Theo?" she asked. "Shall I call your husband to take you home?"

"Yes, if—you—please," gasped Theo in desperation, struggling to escape from the Avernus which seemed to surround her.

The spinster sped away on her errand of mercy to perform another act toward the reformation of the pagan world.

"Madam," she hissed to the Frugatza, "you are detaining Mrs. Wendell's husband." Then she turned fiercely on Wendell. "Go!" she commanded. "Your gross immorality is killing your poor, neglected wife!" As she spoke her finger dangled in startling proximity to his nose, and involuntarily he drew back.

Madam, in her low, musical tones, laughed



mockingly. "Hyena, or mother-in-law?" she questioned. "She comes at us as if shot from a cannon. And her closely clinging creation bears out the poetic impression."

"There is no gun of sufficient force to make an impression on an object so brassy and immodest as you are, woman!" retorted Miss Flintof. "And as for you, sir," turning fiercely on Wendell, "Beware! The crisis must come, and when it does I'll make you lick the dust! Right must conquer, and the weak will slay the strong, as David slew Goliath!"

Madam raised her lorgnette, and regarded the bristling spinster. "Wasn't the poor giant slain by a rubber sling—or was it the jaw of an ass?" she asked sweetly. Then she laughed again. "Dear Sir Rupert, you would better go. I see your debonair plumage of independence is wilting. Good-night. Oh, Eric, so delighted you chanced along. I'm dying for a caviar." And she floated serenely toward the dining room, on the arm of another admirer.

Theo gave a sigh of relief as she entered her own home that night. She brought her husband's slippers and cigar, made him comfortable in his easy chair, and then almost forgot her grievances. But Wendell was silent and moody for the remainder of the evening. In vain the affectionate girl nestled beside him, stroked his face, toyed with his curly hair; he returned her caresses in an impassive manner, without a spark of the olden ardor. Her heart sank within her, but she waited and hoped that each moment would reawaken her husband's warmth of feel-



ing, and give him back to her longing arms as she would have him. But when the silence of midnight came, and he slumbered soundly beside her, the smouldering fires within her breast could no longer be subdued. She timidly reached for his hand, then shook him gently.

"Hubby, darling, don't you love me any more?"

The quick throbbing of her heart was the only response that broke the stillness.

Another and a more vigorous shake.

"Answer me, dearest, my poor heart is breaking because of those horrid women. Oh, Rupert, speak to me!" she almost sobbed.

Wendell stirred in his sleep, and in the dim moonlight Theo saw his lips move. She bent anxiously to catch his words.

"Yes, Marcella—sweetheart, I would give you all my love were I—were I——"

With a bound Theo was out of bed, and stood panting in the middle of the floor, a beautiful, accusing victim of the green-eyed monster. Her leap aroused the unsuspecting husband, who, in the indiscretion of slumber, had revealed his secret. Believing Theo to be in some peril, he sprang to her rescue. But she was frenzied with rage, and darted from his outstretched arms, hurling an avalanche of accusation upon him. Unable to grasp the situation, Wendell stood before her in bewilderment, his snowy nightrobe lending him the appearance of a priest in celestial garb.

"I do not understand your ravings; what is



wrong?" he asked during a temporary lull in the fermentation of love and jealousy.

"Giving the affection of your heart to that Italian woman!" screamed Theo, through another gush of tears, which fell like an April shower over her rose and lily face.

When, at length, she made him understand the import of his drowsy confession, he said vehemently, "Why, how absurd! You yourself have been dreaming. I never gave utterance to any such insane sentiment!"

After a rather unsatisfactory explanation Wendell persuaded his wife to return to their couch. He petted her in a lukewarm way, telling her she was nervous, and recommending her to go to sleep. He decided that his wife must be safely launched in dreamland before he again indulged in the luxury of sleep; and as that was impossible for her, he faithfully kept his night watch, wild thoughts running riot through his weary brain.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## A PROFLIGATE'S PROTECTION.

The next morning breakfast was ordered sent from the hotel. Theo's chilling dignity and sorrowing aspect bespoke the injured wife, and there was a famine of caresses. She meant to teach her spouse a severe lesson. But evidently it was lost upon him. Breakfast over, he walked out whistling, banging the door after him. Then Theo threw aside the mask.

"No—good-bye—kiss!" she sobbed, as her head sank upon the table, regardless of the fact that her amber tresses were partly in the gravy dish. Tears, the panacea for feminine woes, fell splashing on the tablecloth, and the young wife's pretty face, for the time, was distorted and ugly. Her soul was shaken as by a tempest, and then she began to assume the blame for all the trouble. After the penance of tears, sobs and groans, her heart hungered for caresses, her stricken soul thirsted for the refreshing dews of love. So she went to the desk and wrote an humble confession of her own folly.

"You thought me faultless, dear hubby—alas! that so soon I should reveal the despicable failing, jealousy," etc.

"Go quickly, and wait for an answer," she



said, placing the letter in the hands of a colored serving boy. And then she glanced at the clock.

"A whole hour of suspense," she sighed, before his precious missive of peace and pardon will come."

The hour dragged by, and finally the boy shuffled in, embarrassed and grinning.

"Where is the reply to my letter?" his mistress demanded hysterically.

"Mars Ruput ain't gi' me nuttin; he say he didn't had time to wrote you, an' 'e can't git yer fo' lunch; but will be yer six o'clock dis ebenin', sho."

Long and lonely was the day for Theo. Books, music, and every other diversion proved distasteful to her. In the afternoon she arrayed herself in a bewitching costume of delicate blue and filmy lace, which she well knew would enhance her blonde beauty. She endeavored to shake off the mental depression which she suffered, but her misgivings had fatally marred the sunshine of her life.

At sunset, with a feeling of unrest, but happy in anticipating her husband's coming, she took her old stand at the window, there to watch for him as she had done in the honeymoon days, fourteen months ago, when she had fancied herself the one immovable star in the shifting horizon of man's devotion.

Time passed unheeded, while in her hopeful reverie she pictured her husband alone in his office, yearning for her with the same heart hunger which she felt for him; and she foresaw a reconciliation never again to be marred by doubt.



The stroke of the clock brought her back from dreamland.

"What! seven o'clock!" she exclaimed, "and Rupert not here? Oh, dear, dear!" Her smile faded into a look of anxiety, and again she turned to the window.

"I must be patient," she said to herself, recalling her good resolutions. Then the opposite side of the question arose, and she held battle royal with her absent foe.

"Oh, for more independence of spirit than I possess," she sighed. "My timid and reserved nature bars me from my rights. Oh, that I had the courage of my aunt! How, with only a look, would I annihilate that hateful Marcella! I cannot understand how Rupert can fancy the companionship of a woman so bold. But she actually throws herself at him. Dear Rupert is blameless, for she tests his gallantry. I will assert myself in future, and foil her bold advances."

Theo's lips trembled, and curled in scorn. She shook her fist at the mental image of her dangerous rival. She tried to forget that when in the enemy's camp all such heroic resolutions would vanish.

The clock chimed half-past seven. She tried to become interested in the street scene. Dashing carriages, bearing bright-faced, laughing occupants, rolled by, heavy trucks thundered past with the same degree of interest for her. The promenading throng swept along unheeded. Again and again she turned restlessly to the clock, as though seeking inspiration or comfort.



Several times she walked uneasily around the room, only to return to the window. But the absent one came not. Like a misty veil, twilight fell. Theo strained her bright eyes looking into the distance, while her sad face pressed against the window pane. It was growing dark within the room, but in mute agony the wife faithfully kept her tryst. At length she murmured in broken accents:

“Our first—day—of—separation! Oh, Rupert, you are punishing me, love, while in your office alone your suffering is as intense as mine. What shall I do?”

She looked across the street. The Windsor was aglow with lights; and in their brilliant glare she saw a tandem slowly wheel up to the hotel stoop. A man alighted, and then turned to assist his companion, a splendidly formed, graceful woman.

“Rupert! and that—creature!” groaned the distracted wife, sinking into a chair, and covering her eyes with her trembling hands.

Theo was no philosopher, and could not reason out the problem of some men’s mysterious magnetism for women in general. She possessed a sensitive and emotional nature, and her conception of life’s fulfilment was clear. Of the old-fashioned Puritan stock, her loftiest aspiration was to fill the sphere of wife and mother, and to be a faithful daughter of the church.

For the moment her noble resolutions of the day were forgotten, while reviving jealousy interpreted indiscretion as crime. She then recalled the conflicts of the night previous, and



the result of her efforts to improve matters. In her weakness she feared to confront her husband with his profligate defiance of her will; so she sat dazed and helpless, striving to master herself.

"Suffer in silence, and die young!" whispered Despair, while blind Love made excuses for the guilty man.

At that uncertain moment there was a familiar footstep, and a loved voice fell like sad music on her ears. Immediately Love grew eloquent, and introduced Hope, thus gaining a victory over Despair.

"In darkness, my pet?" called Wendell cheerily. "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, but was detained longer than I expected. Business," he pleaded, with masculine disregard of truth.

But Theo kept praiseworthy silence. Where had he been? There are questions that discreet and amiable wives do not ask.

"Come, let's go over and have our dinner, sweetheart," said Wendell.

"If you will excuse me, Rupert, I shall be grateful. I haven't the least appetite, and prefer to retire early." Her voice was strained and unnatural.

"What's the matter, Theo? Your hands are cold, darling. I will not go without you. I prefer the society of my wee wifie to the banquet of kings."

A guilty sensation made him self-sacrificing, and after a little indulgence in maudlin sentiment, he struck the bell, and when the servant



entered he ordered "Dinner for two, from the Windsor."

This attention and his all-healing touch brought Theo to a serenely tranquil frame of mind, and she did not refer to last night's offending circumstances.

For several successive evenings Wendell attended his club and political meetings. As they debarred him from feminine society, his wife was satisfied. But a week later Madam Marcella drew him into another wheeling escapade; and that was the *coup de grâce*. Theo's amiability deserted her, and with a wail of distress she entreated Wendell, for the sake of his unborn child, to spare her the sight of his unchecked infatuation.

"Give me no more cause for pain," she implored, winding her arms caressingly around his neck. "Hubby, darling, for your sake I would suffer adversity too great to estimate—even death at the stake were it necessary. But the torture of sharing your smiles, your attentions with other women—oh, spare me! I love you, dearest, that explains all. I've had enough of hotel life, and we must make other arrangements speedily. Aunt Charlotte says that we can take our meals with her until——"

Wendell gave a warwhoop, and sprang from his chair, as if a lash had struck him. For a moment he stood wild-eyed, and in hostile attitude. "We will not discuss it," he said wrathfully; "anything but Aunt Charlotte, if you please."

For a moment he gnawed savagely at his mustache, while mentally revolving matters. He rec-



ognized in himself a free-thinker wedded to a saintly Christian, who studied ethics to her own detriment. She would ever be submissive to her spiritual adviser, Miss Flintof, through whose counsel and device he must continue to suffer persecution. His fertile brain conceived the idea that his former liberty of action was no more, and he must devise a plan by which to keep his wife in ignorance of his movements, as he continued to increase in social prestige. He did not realize that his fancy had a roving tendency, which was anything but conducive to conjugal felicity. A jealous wife, tears and hysteria, he decided, were good things from which to get away. So, to avoid open rupture, he kept pace with his conclusion.



## CHAPTER XV.

## POPULARITY OF A BACHELOR PARSON.

Campville was well represented about the post-office at noon. The event of the day was the arrival of the mail. While the loungers waited, they discussed crops and criticised their neighbors. The better class of villagers sat in their time-worn vehicles, lamenting the tardiness of the mail carrier, and later they made ostentatious display of a circular, or a county newspaper.

The Reverend Harold Clayborn moved among these people with the assurance of a lord of the realm. Owing to the scarcity of eligible men in Campville, he enjoyed great popularity among all classes. He had recently received his call, and had come from an eastern city to fill his pastorate. He felt his advantages over these simple country folk, and looked upon them with patronizing toleration, which sometimes was not unmixed with lofty contempt. But the reverend gentleman fairly reveled in the conquests made among the women of his parish; and, like "Holy Willie," he complacently appropriated to himself the homage which should have been passed on to the power he was supposed to represent. At the suggestion of the irresistible Clayborn, societies which had gone to pieces under the patriarchal



administration of veteran saints, sprang magically to life. With one accord the women of Campville clothed themselves in the garb of righteousness, devoting most of their time and attention to church matters.

"Mr. Clayborn is so darling," was the feminine verdict. "Isn't he a perfectly ideal minister—and so very modern! He is just the kind we long have needed to warm us up." And the ladies told the truth about their temperature, for in the secret chambers of each maiden and spinster heart burned a smothered flame of love for its spiritual protector. The hope of being "the one" to find especial favor in his eyes shed its cheering rays into their devout souls; and aspiring mammas figured conspicuously in the competition. Clayborn smiled his approval, and smoked the cigars of husbands, fathers, brothers and sweethearts during private conferences with fair devotees in need of spiritual counsel. He possessed a fine sense of humor and a goodly share of world-flavored experience. He knew just where and when to rally his female followers in their vehement endeavors to "boom" the cause of salvation.

Clayborn was proficient at the card table—fairly doted on the "green," was a keen judge of racehorses, and a connoisseur in sampling wines.

Malvin, a well-to-do planter, and a man of prominence in Campville, was a vestryman of the church. He had one daughter, Mary, a veteran maiden, who had counted the harvest of forty crops. She was spare, sallow and angular. To a mirth-provoking degree she became enamored

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of the young minister. He slyly encouraged her predilection; he praised her clever management in keeping the church treasury supplied with funds, and hinted that she would make a treasure of a wife for some fortunate man; that he preferred the society of a sensible woman, qualified for life's duties, to that of a frivolous girl; but, alas! his profession demanded that he should show no partiality. He then looked pleadingly into Miss Mary's honest gray eyes.

    Their color was so very like  
    Unto her daddy's pewter,  
    As smilingly they said to him,  
    "You are my favorite suitor."

Miss Mary also was clever. She taught the clergyman to depend upon her support in church affairs; she drove him about in her old-fashioned phaeton; in his honor she gave frequent mild, uneventful teas, at which he was "the" man, and she studied his vagaries of appetite. In short, she revealed to him, by her estimable virtues, what an ideal wife should be. When Cupid's arrow pierces a spinster's heart it takes the form of a corkscrew, which turns her brain as well as her heart.

Now, Clayborn's hobby was horseflesh, and he rode often. Riding, therefore, became a craze among the females. Miss Malvin, who had never before placed a horse in an awkward position, attempted to develop her equestrian ability. In a long green habit, of ancestral cut, she made her appearance on a sleepy old



farmhorse. All trembling and cautious, she clung to the horn of her saddle with one hand, and to the rear of it with the other, her face distorted in an agony of apprehension. Two long ropes were attached, one to the right bridle ring, and the other to the left one; and two boys, one on each side of the narrow street, led the lazy beast along. Traffic was suspended while she passed down the line.

Now, Cecil Dupree's influence was beginning to be felt in Campville and the adjacent country. The strength and sincerity of her personality made a lasting impression on the sluggish community, and produced favorable results. When the young girl had been in Campville for a season a church festival was given. Blue blood and riffraff were commingled indiscriminately for the occasion. Financially the riffraff was indispensable.

It was Cecil's debut into Campville society, and by request she presided at a refreshment table. Cheerfully she directed her energies toward making both a social and financial success of the evening. Unassuming, and as natural as a child, she commanded the admiration of all present. Her charming ease of manner banished reserve, and stimulated community of interest. At the close of the evening she sang a sweet, simple melody. Her voice was superb, and Clayborn was so delighted that he requested the ladies of his choir to invite her to join them. But his fair admirers met his request with an uplifting of the eyebrows, and low murmured disapproval; so he was constrained to resign the



hope. The women feared a rival in this beautiful, blooming girl, and they kept close watch on Clayborn.

But for all their watching and gratuitous attention Clayborn managed to hang about Cecil a great deal that evening, while the other women fluttered about, clucking like anxious hens, whose duckling has found water. Clayborn was fascinated by the cultured little lady. He had kept all Campville intimidated by his wonderful store of knowledge. When he advanced a theory he was never disputed. He was piqued to find that Cecil met him on equal ground, contested his opinions, and politely flouted his egotism. And presently he began to realize that the girl's general information equaled his own, and that she was a more profound thinker. Furthermore, her sincerity tore the mask from his pretensions. This irritated him, but compelled his respect.

In appreciation of his unparalleled wisdom the people of Campville had elected Clayborn a trustee of the county school. His supervision, they said, would promote the most exalted results, and insure the only form of discipline that the school had ever known. Every minute circumstance was submitted for his approval, and it was taken for granted that he had the same privilege to control the teacher that he had to control the pupils.

On one occasion, when Cecil was in the midst of arduous labors, Miss Malvin's phaeton stopped at the schoolhouse, and Clayborn entered the building. His mission was to advise,



for the common welfare of the school, and to sustain its dignity, that Jack Sanders be expelled, and that two others of his kind be severely punished, as repeated complaints against these three had been made to him by the village patrons of the school. Now, Jack's offenses, although not criminal, were not in accordance with the requirements of those well-bred people, and he had led the other boys into mischief. Cecil gave a polite hearing to Mr. Clayborn's high-flown lecture, delivered in the presence of her pupils. While he spoke he turned his back full upon Jack Sanders, and never deigned to glance at the lad. When the parson had finished speaking Cecil said quietly:

"I have no misdemeanor in the school beyond my control, Mr. Clayborn. When I require advice of the trustees I shall report. Till then I must ask you to kindly refrain from interference with my duties. Jack Sanders shall not be expelled." Cecil's red lips came together firmly, and she looked unflinchingly into the minister's eyes. The muscles of his face twitched nervously.

"No?" he questioned meaningly.

"No," she replied, with equal significance. "The souls of the backwoods children are as precious as those of your parish, sir; and you should discriminate between justice and policy. Many victims of the law are boys who have been banished from educational advantages. Possibly abusive teachers developed the savage in their natures. These boys here are full of unharmonized power, which can be converted to good



ends, and it is our duty to develop them. Natures which follow the lines of least resistance, and are tractable because of an absence of force, are never heard from in mature life, one way or the other."

Clayborn shrugged his shoulders and looked uncomfortable. "My dear Miss Dupree, you should take into consideration that the children of my parish are of refined families, and are being reared with gentility. They should not be subjected to degrading associations."

"The degradation," rejoined Cecil, "exists only in the suspicious minds of those who would expel a destitute and friendless youth from his last opportunity of an education and possible moral development. My position demands that I should not condemn until every effort has been made to reclaim the erring."

Clayborn felt that his professional charity had been satirized. He twirled his sacred moustache and for a moment stood in silent confusion.

"I must discharge my duty as trustee," he said.

"And I must discharge my duty as teacher; so you will kindly excuse me while I proceed with my classes."

Again the man and the woman eyed each other, and he realized that she was the stronger of the two. He realized, too, that his action had been hasty and impulsive, and that it had been the result of the influence of others. The mortification that dyed his cheeks scarlet came as a new experience; and yet the little teacher's rebuke awakened in him no resentment. While



his heart yielded her an involuntary deference, he could say nothing. He merely pressed her hand warmly, and withdrew.

Cecil did not look at the young man as he turned away, or she would have beheld proof of Jack's profligate disregard of that ecclesiastical dignitary. "Sin kure man pa'sin heavin born," was placarded on Mr. Clayborn's coat-tail. And as he drove away, the incorrigible Jack flattened his nose against the window pane, in order to make a wry face at him.

"Le' me lick him fo' you, Miss Cecil?" cried Jack. "Dog ef I don't drive a hole through 'im in a minute!" He doubled his giant fist in pleasurable anticipation, and with the bullying gesture of challenge, arose from his seat; but after one look into his teacher's eyes he squirmed back into his place.

Simple-minded Susan Green burst into hysterical laughter, in which the other pupils joined. "I never h'ard tell o' beatin' of a pa'sin afo'," she said, by way of apology; "peticular w'en his gal is with 'im."

"Jack Sanders!" called the teacher, with flashing eyes and anger in her voice, "see the trouble that you cause me every day! Why wound and grieve me thus? If my efforts in your behalf are not acceptable I will go away; but do not distress me further." Tears were upon her eyelashes as she stood regarding the audacious boy.

Again he arose, this time with a solemn look of repentance. Previously he had shown strange misgivings, and had slunk away from his teacher's friendly advances. Suspicion, born of



abuse, was in him, and kept him ever on the defensive. His experience with human nature was confined to a cruel father and a high-tempered stepmother. But when he heard his teacher defend him he recalled her repeated acts of kindness to him, and a strange feeling of tenderness melted his great heart, revealing to him his own ingratitude and deficiencies. He shuffled awkwardly from one foot to the other, and then spoke.

"Miss Cecil, I r'speck you, ma'am, an' I r'speck your school chillen a leetle, but I don't take much off'n pa'sins." He then advanced and held out his hand. "Beat me, Miss Cecil," he said; "gi' me a hund'ed lashes. I d'sarve it, an' I'm pufectly willin' to tote it—but don't lef' us." His voice faltered. "You's the fust frien' I ever had sence my ma died. I'm usen to it, so lay it thar."

Cecil fancied that she beheld a world of good hidden beneath the rough exterior, and she spoke with subdued sweetness and a pathetic tone of appeal:

"It would not gratify me to punish you, Jack; it would give me pain instead. Can you not see that you are abusing my friendship when I would save you from ignorance and crime? Jack, the opportunity is before you to make your life what you will by persistent effort day by day. I want you to grow into a good and useful man, whom everyone will respect. I want to be proud of you."

As the boy stood holding out his toil-hardened hand for chastisement, Cecil laid her dainty





"Beat me, Miss Cecil," he said.







white palm in it. At this Jack burst into tears and sobbed aloud; and from that moment a bond of eternal friendship was sealed between them. It was the turning point in his wretched life, and thereafter never did boy struggle harder to overcome evil tendencies in himself.

Cecil's earnest, sensitive heart was filled with a great happiness. She felt repaid for all the tribulations she had endured in her efforts to reach the boy's conscience. The incident seemed to tell her that no discouragement in life is too great to overcome, no kindness too great to show to those unfortunates who are separated from their fellow creatures by a great social abyss.

In his corner Jack continued to weep quietly tears of genuine repentance. But when he came forward to recite manly resolution beamed on his begrimed face, which to Cecil was now very beautiful.



## CHAPTER XVI.

## A CHECKMATED ADMIRER.

When summer once more smiled over Campville Cecil's pupils persuaded her to accept an invitation to the annual Fourth of July picnic. Scoggins, who was on the committee, declared that her presence would be the "finishin' off tech" to the occasion. The event marked a red letter day in the lives of those primitive people. They could not conceive of a more hilarious form of enjoyment. Farmers brought their families from a distance of thirty miles, many of them traveling all night in covered wagons in order to reach the spot on time. At seven o'clock in the morning of the eventful day the picnic ground was crowded. From one huge tent claret lemonade was lavishly dispensed. From another, corn whiskey—illegitimate and the mountaineers' pride—flowed like water. Lawless specimens of humanity hung about these centers of attraction—fighters, hardshell Baptists, and the kind of "damn a nigger democrat" fellows, who could cleverly conduct a lynching.

The military was awkwardly represented. Brass buttons were conspicuous over fearless hearts; but, judged by the fit of the uniforms,



every soldier had exchanged his own regimentals with his opposite in size and height. The tallest wore trousers which did not reach his ankles, and they were so extremely tight as to make stooping dangerous. The breeches of the shortest man were rolled up abundantly, and were so voluminous as to lend him a feminine appearance and a swish as of skirts.

Squeaky fiddles and banjoes made music for the dancers. "Set to your partner!" was heard a mile down the avenue entrance. Booted and spurred, the brawny cavaliers leaped and jigged to the inspiring strains. "Swing yo' partners an' yo' corners," rose above other sounds of the riotous festivities, and the florid faced lassies were sometimes lifted from their feet during the excitement of the dance.

At a distance Cecil enjoyed the picturesque and rustic scene, as she tossed the little children high in a grapevine swing, or taught them to play some game. Before noon, however, she met with a disconcerting experience.

Eli Mervin, one of the Scoggins' boarders, became ardently attracted to Cecil and, with the confidence born of ignorance, he tried to thrust his attentions upon her. Unhesitatingly she snubbed him, but his coarse nature failed to recognize her rebuffs; and, wishing to appear superior to his associates, he persistently followed her footsteps.

After dinner Jack Sanders sidled up to his teacher and in a sheepish manner began to talk. "Miss Cecil, is you tired?" he asked.

"Correct yourself, Jack," she responded,



Thinking for a moment, he repeated to himself, "Am, are, is," then good-naturedly exclaimed, "Are you tired?"

"Yes, Jack, just a little."

"Does that feller Mervin bother you too much?"

"Yes, decidedly. Can you not induce him to join the dancers? Or else take him for a walk. Get him away, I implore you."

"You jist hold on, Miss Cecil," said Jack, with a meaning nod; "I promise you'll git shed of 'im spotly." There was a merry twinkle in his eyes, which Cecil remembered long after he had gone.

Mervin was in a tent, refreshing himself with a glass of corn whiskey. As if unconscious of his presence Jack spoke loudly from the doorway to the man who sold liquor.

"Say, Mister, is it any danger fo' me to swim from the bluff to the landin'?"

"Yes, unless you are a capital swimmer," replied the man gruffly.

"I jist ax you 'cause Miss Cecil Dupree says she don't b'lieve tha's a man on the groun's brave 'nough to do it. An' I b'lieve the one what done it would have a right sma't chance o' winnin' out with her." Jack restlessly fumbled with the tent rope, then added: "B'lieve I'll try it."

Mervin, who would have performed any feat for a smile of approval from Miss Dupree, immediately started out in the direction of the river. But Jack was clever; he ran ahead of the would-be suitor.



"Hold on, Sanders, you fool!" called Mervin, "you can't do it! Let me try first."

"All right, sar," replied Jack, halting; "but w'en you git half way, I'm a comin', too."

Together Mervin and Jack descended the river bank.

The two young men were not missed for some time from among their associates. Other distractions and many exciting occurrences were claiming general attention. A number of politicians among the picnickers were contributing their quota to the day's entertainment, for in the coming autumn a general election was to take place. Candidates who, "at the request of their friends," were seeking office, extended to farmer, beggar and scullion the honest hand of friendship. The ambitious gentlemen "swung corners" with unsophisticated milkmaids, laboriously trying to follow the rustic beauties' weighty grace of motion. They sought young mothers with promising offspring, admired and dangled the infants on political knees. They helped the farmers water the animals, talked crops, and handed out plugs of tobacco. In short, their philanthropic advances captured all hearts. Finally the candidates prepared to make stump speeches, and requested the military men to support them in their efforts.

"Ho, ye gallant cap'n!" began a broken down aristocrat, in need of money. "Ye military braves, who are to-day representing the most powerful nation on God's green earth, be patriotic in the politics of your county as well! Be loyal, and put in office such men as would spurn



a position for the filthy lucre they get out of it; and, if necessary, dare and die for the welfare of the Legislature!"

This oratorical flourish inspired the few straggling members of the Campville infantry within hearing, and with loud "hurrahs" they rushed to arms.

"Fall een!" called the first sergeant, interrupting the stump speaker.

Very few obeyed the order.

"Fall een!" again called the sergeant.

Three awkward soldiers swaggered leisurely into line. Repeatedly the order was given, and as often almost ignored.

"Why in the h—— don't you come to the call?" shouted the captain, in wrathful tones.

"'Cause nearly all the comp'ny is a dancin'," explained a private in the rear rank.

"Whar's Gin'ral Yatkins?" called the captain.

"In the lockup, drunk," was the reply.

"Whar's the constable?"

"He's in the lockup, too, fer chokin' a woman; her husban' was the best man, so he slapped 'im in thar."

"Let 'im stay thar, damn 'im!" shouted the gallant captain. "No woman beater is fitten fer nuthin'."

"Hurrah!" was yelled from a hundred strong throats.

"Forward, march!" commanded the captain. He moved forward with his few men, and halted them beside the dance platform.

"Now will ye come?" called the captain to the soldiers who figured in the quadrille.



The dancers had discarded their heavy coats and, perspiring copiously in their shirtsleeves, they were "cutting the pigeon wing."

"Fall een!" yelled the captain and the first sergeant simultaneously. But "cheat or swing" was the only reply from the dancing soldiery.

"I'll go fetch 'em!" cried a volunteer, anxious to defend the discipline of his company. The captain nodded to the lusty young man, who immediately mounted the platform and called in thunderous tones: "Say, thar! I don't want to shoot in the crowd of women folks, but I swar I'll do it ef you don't fall een!"

"We ain't a comin' a darn step tell this dance is over," was the reply. "We dar' you to shoot!"

The defeated brave stepped back, and shouted to the captain, "Whar's Lieutenant Mervin? He'll make 'em fall een, fer he's as brave a man as ever cut a throat, burnt a house, or lynched a nigger!"

But Lieutenant Mervin was among the missing; therefore military and political discipline were overruled by the dancing element.

At sunset it was reported that the irrepressible Jack Sanders had enticed Mervin into the river adventure, and that when Mervin was well down stream Sanders had run away with the lieutenant's clothes. Neither the clothes nor Sanders could be found.

"Jack Sanders will yit die with his shoes and clothes on, for his'n is a goin' to be a onnatu'al death," declared Mrs. Scoggins to Cecil. "He ain't afear'd o' nuthin' an' nobody; he's kep' Mr. Mervin in the 'oods fer three hours, an' nobody



never h'ard him till a ol' nigger come up in a rowboat, an' foun' 'im a shiverin' in the bushes. I'm s'prised at you, Miss Cecil, fer takin' a likin' to Jack Sanders. I wouldn' 'low my gals to sochet with 'im."

"I believe, Mrs. Scoggins, that I have the liberty to like or dislike whom I please," rejoined Cecil spicily.

Mrs. Scoggins squatted on the ground in a very inelegant attitude, as she munched a piece of potato pie, and drank pink lemonade from a tincup.

"Mr. Mervin would make a mighty good husband' fer you, Miss Cecil," she remarked, by way of apology. "He's got a fine mar' an' colt, forty acres of——"

"I am not here for the purpose of marriage," interrupted Cecil; "kindly commit that to memory."

Further comment was checked by the sudden appearance of Mary Ann Scoggins. She was greatly excited, and the perspiration poured from her fat, red face. She was the heroine of a bowie knife tragedy, for two rustics had locked in deadly combat over the question as to which one should take her home. While Mrs. Scoggins sat agape at the idea of Cecil's indifference to Mervin, who was considered a "good catch," a horrible yell, mingled with oaths and wrangling, came to their ears.

"They've hitched ag'in! I knowed it was a comin'!" cried Mrs. Scoggins, as she jumped up and stood in a listening attitude. "It's Perkins and Blunt. They've fought twice already to-



day, an' now it sounds like the whole fam'lies is a j'inin' in. I think I'll go stop pa from takin' a hand. But Ma'y Ann, whar's Bully?"

"Bully Scoggins ain't no run off cock," replied Mary Ann, with a burst of laughter. "Las' time I seen 'im he was a fightin' the three Slocum boys, an' the Slocum gal was a punchin' of 'im with a long pole; an' their ma was a lickin' at 'im with a fishin' rod; an' their leetle dog was a swingin' to the seat of his pant'loons, but Bully was a keepin' up his repitition."

"Sakes alive!" exclaimed Mrs. Scoggins, "he's been a fightin' eva' sence he lit out o' the wagon a' ta' Rogers boy, soon 'smornin'."

The hubbub increased, and far and near the woods echoed the belligerent sounds.

"Please let's go away from here!" begged Cecil, piteously; "my head aches and I must go home."

"All right, honey," replied Mrs. Scoggins; "but don't git skeered, for tha' neva' was a picnic here in the las' fifty years' thout the men got as full as goats, an' fit tooth an' toenail."

The grand finale to the day's merrymaking was a mob fight. Too much "corn" had demoralized the crowd.



## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE LOVELY CHERUB.

Housekeeping re-established, Theo Wendell cheerfully resumed her domestic responsibilities. Very soon the birth of a son brought quite a change into the home. Wendell proved a devoted husband during his wife's convalescence; but when she was fully restored to health he once more sought his social diversions, and he was received among his old friends with abundant cordiality.

When Rupert II was a month old the nurse was discharged and the youthful mother anticipated manifold delights in the care of her wonderful child. She said that during its tender infancy the treasure should be attended only by its parents. But in her maternal indulgence she spoiled that treasure so completely that soon her strength became exhausted, and she was constrained to call her husband into the joys of midnight vigil. This novel experience had a tendency to develop a temper in Wendell. He struggled to overcome his irritability, but with volcanic force it would find vent. And, pacing the floor in the dreary stillness of midnight, he would exclaim:

"By thunder, this exercise of limb and pa-



tience is more harrowing than walking post at a military school! Oh, you insignificant, wriggling, squalling brat, to send forth such volume of sound!" He gave the baby a cautious little shake, and as a swell from an organ, its tones became deeper. A vigorous toss up and down, then baby held his breath, and his color changed from red to purple.

"Give me my child!" cried the mother in alarm. "God's own little messenger, the symbol of love sent as heaven's best gift—yours and mine, Rupert."

"All yours," mumbled the sleepy man, as he crawled into bed.

"It's very cry is perfect melody to me; it is the echo of our wedding bells, hubby," said Theo, as she smothered the little one with kisses.

The slumbers of this extraordinary infant were short and infrequent; its delight was in the solemn midnight march, which seemed the only thing that could quiet its frisky temperament. If the walking ceased for a moment, its bright eyes would open in wonder, and its voice was tuned to a wail of anger.

Wendell administered, with unsparing hand, brandy, castoria, paregoric. Sometimes rough-on-rats timidly suggested itself to his weary brain. Finally he declared that he could no longer endure the wear and tear of these midnight ordeals, and he resolved to find a trustworthy nurse.

"Oh, my dear," protested Theo, "I cannot bear to think of trusting the lovely cherub to a nurse.



I would rather care for my darling every minute of the day and night than feel that he was in the hands of some irresponsible creature."

"Just as you like," retorted the irate husband, "but my position as floor walker is from this moment resigned; and if you continue to indulge the young rascal in habits so vile, I shall take a sleeping apartment at the Windsor. I must have rest, or I cannot carry on my business."

The threat acted like magic; it set the wife to thinking; it recalled jealous heartaches.

"Well, get the nurse if you think best," she replied, as she hugged the babe to her breast. "I will train her if she is inefficient; and I'll keep a close watch over my jewel—my heart."

The next day, at an early hour, nurse Sarah arrived. Black and benevolent of countenance, humble to a fault, she was yet ever ready to instruct young mothers in the art of "raisin' chil'en."

Mrs. Wendell reluctantly placed her babe in Sarah's arms. "My beautiful son, with his father's eyes!" she murmured, and stood near, in dread of—she knew not what. Her knowledge of cooks and house servants made her distrustful.

Sarah glanced at the young mother from the corner of her eye, and remarked: "No kagun to watch me so close, misses. Don't you bodder 'bout de chil', kase I's a sperienced nuss. I done raise 'bout a t'ousan' chil'en, black, white an' yaller, an' I's a gwine to raise dis one, wid de Lord's he'p. We must l'a'n dis leetle fellow to be tough, an' den he won't be sickly."



Sarah's words, instead of quieting the misgivings of her mistress, caused Theo to be still more watchful.

"Remember that baby is only six weeks old, Sarah," the nurse was cautioned; "hold him tenderly."

"Yes'm, yes'm; I know all 'bout dat age fo' chil'en. You go eat your breakruss, my misses, an' make youse'f sati'fy."

Before the meal was over there was a smothered squall from baby. The anxious mother sprang from her chair and rushed into the adjoining room. Sarah stood before the mantel, gripping baby's skirts, which were drawn over his head, while he dangled bowlegged before the fire. He kicked and squirmed in trying to catch his breath, while the determined nurse smoked a chalk pipe, and patiently awaited the desired result.

"What are you doing with my baby?" cried Mrs. Wendell, in a voice of terror.

"I was lannin' him to t'row 'e water in de chimby, ma'arm, so dat he'll be neat wid 'e clothes," replied Sarah, with quiet reassurance. That, however, was the last art she tried to teach the boy.

Her successor was a buxom mulatto—Priscilla Leonora Primrose Washington—youthful and coquettish.

"A treasure, I think," said Wendell to his wife. "Give the child into her care, Theo, for her recommendations are of the best. The continual anxiety you suffer is maddening. I cannot longer endure this state of affairs."



But Priscilla proved to be a more complex proposition than her predecessor. Concerning the care of the infant she ignored her mistress and appealed to "the boss." Whenever the time for his home-coming approached she consulted her mirror, and to a noticeable degree she flaunted her finery before his eyes. She moved with a fancy strut, which gave the desired shake to her pleasing rotundity of form. She cleverly managed to display her elaborately trimmed and overstarched petticoats and was extravagant in the use of musk and cologne. Her insolent advances had a tendency to arouse murderous resentment in the fastidious "boss." They surprised and alarmed Theo, and Miss Flintof's condemnation and warning hastened Miss Washington's banishment from the Wendell home.

"Find a nurse without personal charms," advised the spinster; "one whom you approve. Allow Wendell no word in the matter."

This was exactly what Wendell desired, and in his anxiety to please he sent several colored applicants to the house each day for his wife's approval. Baby narrowly escaped with his life upon many occasions during Theo's search for a competent nurse. One of them almost suffocated him in her anxiety to keep him warm; another one insisted upon covertly giving the child a taste of her favorite viands, which caused sudden and alarming illnesses. Still another one carried in her bosom pins like harpoons, which pierced the tender little hands. This nurse was replaced by one who usually carried the baby



head downward, and one day while she was bathing the little fellow only the timely appearance of his mother saved him from drowning.

"The kid has a charmed life," laughed the reckless father while listening to a recital of the perils through which his boy had passed. Much to his wife's annoyance, Wendell seemed to regard these barbaric tortures of the child as mirth-provoking occasions, for his laughter often mingled with Theo's sobs and baby's shrill cries, which cries, the father said, reminded him of a "siren whistle."

Baby's advent was effecting a change in the home life of the Wendells. Rupert's natural impulses drove him away from domestic conflicts. His wife was wounded by his increasing indifference to home ties, and gently reminded him that the new burdens should make these ties stronger, and that he should not prefer the sparkle of society to the joys of the nursery. Reproaches drove him still further away.

"Honeymoon days," said Miss Flintof sagely, "belong to the temperature of man's love; and, like dog days, are of short duration."

With the cooling of Wendell's fiery affections came the natural sequence under which many women must suffer. The young husband became exacting and parsimonious.

Theo passed through her moments of disappointment and unrest bravely. She was too loyal to deplore, in an unguarded moment, anything which would recognize fault in her husband. In her secret soul she refused to acknowledge incongeniality. She thought of the countless men



and women who, having consorted with the wrong mate, were chafing away their lives against the decrees of fate.

"A good wife," she told herself, "should be all love, confidence and obedience."



## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE STRONGER SOUL.

In the struggling ranks of self-sustaining women Cecil Dupree never faltered. She sacrificed to life's stern realities hours usually given over to girlhood's pleasures. She would arise early in the morning and put her small suite of rooms in order before breakfasting. They were very pretty rooms, cosy and artistic, though far from luxurious. A couple of canaries swung in the sunlight, while flowers bloomed near the windows in and out of season. When her income permitted she would add objects of comfort or beauty to her little sanctum, although she more often devoted what money she could spare to the needs of those more destitute than herself. In fact, she sometimes sacrificed her own necessities to another's wants, with an unreserved liberality, as refreshing as it was unusual.

At four o'clock each afternoon Cecil returned from school and devoted the remaining hours of the day to her music scholars. She hovered patiently over children with clumsy fingers and no music in their souls. She never looked unkindly into their perplexed, stupid faces, while persistently training them to hammer out the first



"piece," impatiently anticipated by proud parents. Supper, and a brisk walk through the dusk refreshed the girl after her tiresome labors. She bore the strain well and two years of this unvarying routine did not discourage her, nor mar the bloom of her superb health.

At the end of that time there came to the Robbins House Madam Bellot, a woman of French birth and rearing, advanced in years, and a person who clung pathetically to youth, denying and fretfully resisting the approaching infirmities of age. She was a globe wanderer, who sought life's enjoyments, and forgot its higher calling. Wealthy and alone in the world, she fancied that people coveted her riches. She was cynical and restless, and wore a world-weary expression on her haggish face.

To Cecil's astonishment, this beldame manifested a marked preference for the young girl's companionship. Cecil received these advances impartially, for wealth and position were given no preference in her democratic nature.

One night an alarming attack of nervousness seized the Madam. Uncharitable people said it was "delirium tremens," and were shocked when they heard the ancient dame hurl her slipper at the head of her maid, Theresa, and order the girl from the room. In tears Theresa fled to Cecil's room, and implored her assistance. Cecil went at once to Madam Bellot, who poured out a dismal tale of her own suffering, the neglect of those around her, the greed and hypocrisy of professional men, and her overwhelming disgust for humanity. Cecil's gentle services proved a



balm for the sufferer, and under the girl's soothing touch the weary brain and throbbing nerves became calm. Cecil kept watch beside the couch from midnight until dawn; and when the sleeper stirred, muttering incoherent words of misery, the girl's soft voice brought comfort and tranquility.

The mysterious woman was overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude, and in her attentions to Cecil she became almost tiresome. She could not understand the girl's happy life, knowing its almost destitute condition; but she enjoyed the sunshine reflected from it. When letters came from her lawyers and stewards, consulting her in the management of her vast estates, in melancholy distress she appealed to Cecil for assistance. The burden of her wealth became too much for her, and the thought of its disposal at her death was to her another source of regret.

Early one morning Madam Bellot was ill with one of her disagreeable attacks, and summoned Cecil to the darkened room, where the old lady lay complaining miserably. Cecil's pity was aroused by the pallid face and emaciated form of the sufferer, and she pressed the thin hands sympathetically.

"Miss Dupree," began the old lady, in sepulchral tones, "I am a physical wreck. My physician's letters recommend sea travel. In fact, he urges that I go without delay. I now offer to take you with me as my protégé. You will have six months of travel, and the enjoyment that it gives—an advantage worthy of acceptance. We will take with us two maids. Do not



refuse me." She made a gesture of impatience, for the expression of Cecil's face checked her speech.

"No, dear Madam Bellot, I thank you very much, but it is impossible for me to accept your generous offer," said Cecil resolutely. "It will give me pleasure, though, to do what I can to help you in preparing for your voyage."

The older woman dropped her hands listlessly beside her, threw back her head, and groaned aloud.

"I think that you will receive vast benefit from the change," continued Cecil, nervously; and she tried to withhold the conversation from her proposed connection with the trip. But the persistent old lady was not to be so easily defeated, for she was accustomed to having her own way. She entreated, shed tears, and almost tore her dyed locks. She sent a messenger to Pine Station to telegraph for a specialist, and then worried herself into one of her maniacal moods. But Cecil's defenses were impregnable, and after she had witnessed a stormy scene she went away to her school.

That night she was disturbed by a violent pounding on her door and Theresa's call for help. In alarm she threw on her dressing gown and hastened to Madam Bellot. The woman, propped with pillows, was wildly wringing her hands, her face ghastly in the dim light, her eyes sunken and circled by shadowy rings. Her nightcap was on the floor, and the bedclothes were tumbled as though she had been in com-



bat with an evil spirit. The village doctor bustled in and looked at her gravely.

"I want to go now!" groaned the invalid, as her hysterics increased. "Let me die! The only mortal I really like has refused my supplication, which if granted, would only prolong my worthless life. Cecil Dupree, your refusal to my entreaties has finished me. Do not give me medicine. Let me die!" She gasped, rolled her eyes, and fell back exhausted by her extravagant speech.

"Well, well," rejoined Cecil, good-humoredly, "but would death improve your condition?"

"What?" questioned Madam Bellot. "I thought you unselfish and humane. Are you like the rest of the world?"

"Exactly," replied Cecil, "and as you seem to be the only faultless being here, doubtless you should wing your flight to a better sphere."

This treatment seemed to have a beneficial effect on the patient, for she lapsed into profound silence, and even forgot to groan. But soon she turned to the doctor and motioned him toward the door. "You may go," she said; "your profession is all rot. Your physic keeps me ill."

The doctor remained silent as he prepared an opiate, and indulged a suppressed smile. He handed Cecil the goblet, and she approached the bedside.

"Drink this," she said, "and if you desire my services for the night, control yourself. If you rave again I'll leave you."

Madam Bellot gazed unflinchingly into the girl's eyes as she took the potion. It was a novel



experience for her to find a person whom her money could not influence, and the failure of that lever nonplussed her. An awkward silence followed, during which the maid rearranged the room.

"Calm yourself and induce sleep," advised Cecil as she chafed the restless old hands. "You alone are to blame for your present condition. You have indulged your own morbid selfishness for so many years that you have lost control of your nerves and mind. Dear Madam Bellot, you have too much good in you to waste the rest of your life so inconsequently. Think of the good you might have done, and that you may do in forgetting yourself and your imagined ills. Think of the many people who haven't bread to eat, clothes to wear, nor a roof to shelter them. Think of the wretched mothers, overburdened and ill, trying to earn a few pennies by working from dawn to dark, in order to provide for their starving babes. Think of the dark tenements, where no sunshine nor fresh air can enter, and where a dozen people are crowded into one room. Think——"

"It isn't pleasant to think of such things," murmured the Madam, closing her eyes with an expression of pain. She remained silent for a while, then said softly: "So long have the doors of mercy been closed on me that the hinges rust. God's frown, like midnight's gloom, has settled over my soul. His mercy is turned away."

Cecil bent down and kissed the troubled brow, singing softly:



“Oh, all embracing mercy, oh, ever open door!  
What shall we do without Thee, when heart and  
eyes run o’er?”

The restless spirit calmed, and sleep settled over the aching eyelids.

Days of waiting and entreaties passed. The invalid’s strength decreased, and her face became more pinched and haggard. The specialist, persuaded by Madam Bellot, presented the matter to Cecil so tragically that the girl grew desperate.

“Do not refuse the Madam’s request,” he urged; “go with her. It will be an act of humanity. She clings to you, Miss Dupree, and if you deny her request the result will be fatal. In her morbid state her discordant characteristics will continue active. She feels that she has outlived her day and generation, so she has wrapped her soul in gloom to await the final issue.”

When alone Cecil gave herself to earnest thought. “My home nest to be abandoned!” she sighed, gazing lovingly at each familiar object. But the next day she went to Madam Bellot. With apparent cheerfulness she consented to the old lady’s wishes, and began preparations for their prospective journey. The invalid rallied and grew more amiable. Her gratitude and generosity were boundless; but the proud spirited girl rebelled at anything like dependence, and refused to accept a penny more than her actual expenses for the trip. Madam Bellot raved about what she termed her own obligation, and forced upon Cecil a munificent check.



"Well, I will accept the money with this proviso," declared Cecil: "I must be allowed to dispose of it as I will, without question." For the girl determined to use it in behalf of her destitute scholars.

As the donor gladly consented, and manifested interest in Cecil's wise and charitable proposition, immediate arrangements were made to place Jack Sanders in a military school. This noble act gave unlimited gratification to Cecil.

There was a touching scene in the school-house when Cecil bade her pupils farewell. The young folks hung about her with affectionate devotion, begging her to promise to return to them. Cecil comforted them as best she could, and told them to remember during her absence all she had tried to teach them.

A week later Madam Bellot and Cecil, with every luxury conducive to pleasant travel, were *en route* for the West. In March they reached San Francisco, that picturesque city where homes are built upon the lofty hills, terrace above terrace, overlooking the marvelous panorama of the harbor below.

The two ladies boarded the steamship "Empress of China," passed through the Golden Gate, and were soon on the broad Pacific. Wind and wave were favorable, and the ship made a calm passage to the Philippines. Cecil's delight was boundless. The wonders of a new world broke upon her keen sensibilities, arousing a childlike enthusiasm which was thoroughly refreshing. The motion of the ship, so distressing to most of the passengers, filled her with a



buoyant feeling of freedom, and the life on shipboard was a source of endless interest to her.

The girl's joyousness was contagious, and brought into the Madam's face the first real smile that had been there for many years. She could not conceal her satisfaction in Cecil's company, and the girl encouraged every glimmer of cheerfulness that had seemed dead within the woman's nature. Madam aroused herself sufficiently to explain to Cecil many strange sights and customs of the eastern islands, with an unusual interest.

"I do not recognize myself," laughed Cecil, while luxuriating in the splendors of the Orient. "I fear that it is a dream, and that I shall awake to find myself again with my classes, expounding mathematical problems, or the piano keyboard."

"Never shall you, Cecil, do another day's work!" said the Madam, vehemently; "and whoever offers you a position shall answer to me for the offense. You shall stay with me always, be as my very own, and have everything provided for you."

Cecil laughed and held up a warning finger. "Let us not discuss that," she said. "Before I would be a child of dependence I would see you die many times of nervous jimjams."

The Madam straightened up severely, but the look of saucy good-nature on Cecil's face disarmed her, and she turned away to conceal a smile that threatened to illumine her hard countenance.

"Grant me this pleasure at least, you inde-



pendent little wretch," pleaded the woman; "wear my jewels as though they were your own." And she adorned Cecil so attractively that, true to the impulses of youth, the girl admired the effect, and consented to wear the simplest of them. Cecil had dash and style, and the bits of finery which Madam forced upon her from time to time helped to bring out the brilliancy of her beauty, and an elegance of bearing.

But Madam was not always as discreet in her habiliments as was her young charge. On one occasion, while in the far East, the old lady appeared in public arrayed in a gown of yellow satin of Oriental design. Her bare feet were thrust into jeweled slippers; jewels flashed from her ears, and weighed heavily upon her fingers, and she coquetted behind a jewel-studded Japanese fan, from which fluttered gaudy feathers. This remarkable incident convinced Cecil that Madam needed a chaperon, and so, with flushed cheeks but abundant will power, the girl lectured that individual. She determined in her own mind to give more attention to Madam's selection of costumes in the future.

"Fashion allows bright colors for women who have passed the meridian of life," whined Madam Bellot.

"True," replied Cecil determinedly, "but fashion which encourages a gorgeous and vulgar style of dress, and one unsuited to women of advanced years should not be tolerated. Dear Madam Bellot, you are not bad looking, but gay, youthful attire makes you look—ahem—ancient!" As Cecil had expected, the effect of



these words upon Madam was immediate and salutary.

In railroad and steamship travel Cecil attended Madam Bellot with unceasing fidelity. She did not trust to the hand of a hireling those delicate attentions so dear to sad hearts. The maid, Theresa, was above reproach, but the invalid had been surfeited by attentions procured only by money, and preferred Cecil's unremunerated services. And Cecil now felt no regret for the sacrifice she had made in temporarily breaking up her home, and leaving her work in Campville. She remembered that, in so doing, she had been able to assist the unfortunate ones whom she had left behind her. True, her mind often returned to her charges in the North Carolina town. Most of all she thought of Jack Sanders. At parting she had impressed upon that illiterate boy's mind the value of the superior advantages before him.

"You will have your ups and downs, Jack," she had said, "but be a brave soldier in life's battle; cherish honor and principle, resist evil, and you will develop into a fine man."

Now Jack's conception of bravery was not exactly in accordance with that which his gracious teacher meant to impress. She realized this when she opened his first letter since he had gone away to school.

"Milinary scule,

"febber warry 11benth.

"Dare misseasel

I wood of rote you befo but I aint had no



time fur nuthin sence I cum but to dfen myself—the hardes wurk I has to do is to fite an very leetle spere time I has frum it. a feller is got to fite weather hes “brave” or no—or he’ll git killed in the mob its wus hare than a battil feel. Tha calls me “odds rat” frum the backood but I made 1 of em think I was a wile bull t’other nite—hes a stuck up feller an he favurs Clayborn the sinkure man—he sick tother rest of the boys on me—wen I fust cum he tole me the nue cummers done the shue shinin, an he fuled me into shinin of hisn fer moarn a weak, fo I foun out he was a darn froud, an I tole im so—an I tole im whar to go—an I slapped im in the face with all the shues in rech an I beet im tell he howled heself hoarse fo sum uther fellers cum to his sistence—then 3 of em cum, buss open the door an then I needed what I never got that was sistence. Tha beet me with three cheers, the kine you set in, but hol on, my time is a cummin an Ile be a ‘brave solger’ all rite, an Ile be ‘up’ that time an them ‘down’ fur Ile hurt their ‘principul’ wharever that is, moarn I hurt ely Mervins on the 4 of Jully picknick wen I ca’d him a swimmer you member your frien Jack Sanders.

P. O.—This oncitely pistil r’flects no credit on you, misseasel, but member my eddication was ruint, an I was set in my ways afore you come to Campville m’am.”



## CHAPTER XIX.

## VALLEY BEAUTIFUL.

In June Madam Bellot and her fair protégé arrived in Chamouni, that valley whose strange beauty has, for so many years, enthralled the tourist. Cecil observed that its inhabitants were crude and stolid looking people. Their history, she learned, dated back to the Norman conquests. Under the rigid rule of the priors the peasants had been subjected to much oppression and suffering. Small misdemeanors were punished by death, and a mere accusation was enough to send an innocent victim to the stake, while the property of the doomed was given to the priory. Not until the close of the sixteenth century did the people of this valley shake off some of the shackles of priestly tyranny, and learn that a great world existed beyond the mighty encircling mountains.

Cecil never tired of gazing up at the great Glacier des Bosson, and Mount Blanc thrilled her with its dominating grandeur. She shared the common ambition of tourists to scale its height, daring the perilous frown of black clouds which so suddenly darkens the summit. The peasants of the early times were not familiar with the peaks and glaciers of the upper region,



although, for many years, they had conducted travelers over the lower part of the Mer de Glace. The lofty peaks and passes were unexplored until Balmat's bravery made Chamouni famous.

Cecil enjoyed also to stroll through the narrow streets of the town of Chamouni, which were thronged with cosmopolitan crowds, in ceaseless motion. Stalwart guides hovered about the many hotels, waiting to conduct inexperienced and ambitious tourists over the dangerous passes, for the frequent accidents in these regions do not deter the daring adventurer from his projects.

Madam Bellot's health was rapidly improving. The ocean voyage had proven a tonic for her nerves, and seemed to have given her a new hold upon life; while her pride and interest in Cecil compelled her to forget herself and her ailments, and therefore inspired within her a nobler sense of living. Cecil observed the change with great satisfaction; for, knowing the invalid's morbid propensities, the girl had anticipated trouble in what she had undertaken. She induced the Madam to walk abroad with her daily, and the exhilarating air of the enchanted region declared its own value.

As the two loitered along the hillside one evening, watching the sunset beyond glittering glaciers, they came to the little English chapel. Its gate and doors stood open, and the deep tones of an organ floated softly, dreamily on the still air. Some one was singing. A peaceful calm seemed to settle over the spirit of Madam



Bellot as she listened. Cecil guided her companion's footsteps to the door of the sanctuary. There the older woman hesitated, until overcome by the mysterious power of the girl's will, she was induced to enter. Madam Bellot had not been inside of a church for many weary years, but she did not feel wholly out of her sphere, for in her obdurate heart something was beginning to throb faintly in harmony with the soothing tones of the organ's message. The priest's absolution was no longer despised, and her interest was awakened in life's nobler vocation. Cecil watched the softening lines in the old lady's face with satisfaction, and the two started homeward in sympathetic silence.

But Cecil most enjoyed the hours when she could go alone to some retired nook in the bewilderingly lovely surroundings. One day as she stood alone, idly dreaming on the rustic bridge that spanned the silvery Arve, she felt her gaze drawn upward until it met that of a stranger, who for some time had been studying her face. She was startled. The color flew to her cheeks, then as rapidly receded. A quivering sigh of undefined emotion escaped her. She felt as if she had known him always, and her pure impulses went forth to meet him. But she quickly recovered herself, and turned away. As she walked slowly down the path she felt that the stranger's superb eyes were following her, and she was glad, although she vouchsafed not a glance backward.

At the Hotel des Alps Cecil saw him again. She learned that his name was Douglas Barry-



more, and she learned also that he was very popular among the titled beauties of Europe who were whiling away the season in this wonderful valley.

"He shall not count me among his conquests," Cecil told herself, as she noted the many inviting smiles cast in his direction, and pitied the weakness of women who were unable to mask their emotions with pride.

"Perhaps he would come to me if—if I chose," she thought, as time after time she passed him with studied indifference, although her heart trembled under his steady, sincere eyes.

Cecil had a number of admirers. Her independence, her fresh young beauty, her dauntless spirit were irresistible attractions. She accomplished feats in mountain climbing where few, if any, women were brave enough to follow. The women shrugged their shoulders and raised their eyebrows, pronouncing her—well, a trifle too sure of herself for good taste. The men spoke of her as "*la petite* of dash and dare." But everyone yielded her the prestige of a presumable heiress, and she therefore enjoyed great popularity. Madam Bellot encouraged this impression, and the two enjoyed the situation as a capital joke. When they were alone Cecil would mimic her admirers, and give ludicrous accounts of their manner of paying her homage. The old lady decked her protégé with her jewels, made her the companion of princesses, and a favorite among the nobles. Only one of Cecil's associates seemed indifferent to her charms—that was Douglas Barrymore.



Among her adorers were two gallants who sought to outdo each other in devoted attentions. One was Bourbon Lafay, a French officer—clever and handsome, and a chivalrous gentleman. His piercing eyes, dark hair and mustache corresponded admirably with his olive complexion, touched with a ruddy warmth of color. Donar Von Halz was a poverty-stricken German count, in hot pursuit of American coin. These twain shadowed the footsteps of the popular Mademoiselle Dupree, who impartially divided her favors between them. Under this treatment jealousy was born and nourished. When unobserved the rivals glanced defiance at each other; but Lafay, small and agile, generally managed to slip in between the clumsy count and the adorable object of his affections. With restless grace the Frenchman would toy with his badge of the Legion of Honor, as if thereby to press his claim upon Cecil's respect and admiration. The mercenary Von Halz, twirling the ends of his mustache heavenward, sought to establish precedence by frequently caressing an ugly scar that stretched across his scalp, and which was inflicted by the sword of a German student. This scar did not enhance his appearance: his pale, goose-like eyes, sorrel tinted hair, and ruddy nose.

Von Halz was a psychologist; he lectured, and in his German brogue expressed strong but sacrilegious ideas. Many and warm were the discussions he held with Cecil on subjects sacred to her, and she was enthusiastic in their defense. He scoffed at and satirized the truths



taught by orthodox Christianity, and used isolated quotations from the Bible to prove his materialistic theories. Unfortunately for his progress in love-making he, in an unguarded moment, declared that Mademoiselle Dupree must be worth ten million marcs if she desired the title of countess. Cecil accidentally overheard the remark, smiled, and mentally decided that possibly she would have a hearing in the matter.

"The love-making of a German," she said to Madam Bellot, "whether genuine or feigned, is monotonous; and his sentimental display of affection is nauseating."

One morning when Cecil was busily engaged in letter writing Count Von Halz was ushered into her presence. With flowery speech he poured out his plaintive yearnings. He addressed her as "Zezil—dear, beautiful Zezil, mit de lufly eyes, so bright wie de chewels on her lufly svan t'roat!" while a strange moisture filled his pale eyes. Finding no response the scalp beneath his yellow locks grew rosy. He had not anticipated defeat, for his title in the past had made him a conqueror among American women. He caressed his scar, but instead of exciting the perverse girl's admiration, it led her to apprehend that the student's sword had inflicted an injury upon her suitor's cranium deeper than a mere scalp wound.

Von Halz arose from the half recumbent attitude he had assumed while suffering no doubts, and for a moment stood erect in the position of a soldier bravely facing defeat.



"Then you refuse me, Mademoiselle?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Beyond a doubt, I refuse you, sir!" cried Cecil, her voice trembling, and she withered him with a haughty glance.

Greedy of gain, the man's bravery gave way to servility, and he sank upon his knees. "Few women," he said, "would not feel flattered to be de mistress of a count, and I offer you honorable marriage. Be my wife." He attempted to place his arms around her, but with a sneer she evaded him.

"You are proud spirited, Mademoiselle; you spurn my humility. Did Cheesus Christ tell you to do dat?"

Cecil ignored the sacreligious question, while her eyes flashed with indignation. "End this scene, if you please," she said quietly. "I have no desire to be the heroine of a romance with you. This salon is private. Leave my presence."

Von Halz's patience and eloquence were exhausted, and he resolved to try new tactics. "I am not so easily defeated," he declared stoutly. "I vill not go until I get vat I vant."

"Ah," rejoined Cecil, "that alters the case. Here is what you want, and all that your title is worth." She suddenly opened her handbag and showered him with a handful of sous and centimes. At that moment Douglas Barrymore passed by the low window. Her cheeks grew crimson, and she wondered if he had seen the performance and heard the proposal.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Von Halz,



who said vehemently: "I'll never cease to adore you, nor resign de hope of vinning you, my prout beauty." Again the count picked himself up and toddled toward her. In a tragic manner he reached out his arms, and called her "Sweed-h'a't," and "cruel siren." As he advanced Cecil retreated until she could go no further, and as she drew her hands behind her she touched the bell. Again he went down on his knees before her ladyship, but at that moment the door opened and an attendant waited in questioning attitude.

"Show this gentleman out," commanded Cecil curtly. The rejected suitor scrambled awkwardly to his feet, and with one backward, angry glance, hurried from her presence.

A moment later Madam Bellot entered the room.

"Why, Cecil, what is the matter?" she asked. "You look as if you didn't know whether to laugh or cry."

"I will wear no more diamonds!" declared the girl passionately, and she burst into tears, for she thought of Barrymore.



## CHAPTER XX.

## WHEN LOVE IS SATIATED.

Wendell, as the captain of the Rifle Guards, made a dashing display. He discharged his duties with whole-souled generosity, and upon occasions regally entertained his brother officers. He was a splendid figure on parade, when in full dress uniform, he led his men to the measured music of a brass band. Patriotic women gazed fascinated upon the debonair young officer, and his eyes flashed into their midst with fatal effect. He was fully conscious of his own power of conquest, and he regarded the taking of a feminine citadel as his masculine right.

Each gala day ended with a champagne fête, at which the captain drank to the bewitching eyes and rosy cheeks of "woman, peerless woman!" With rakish eyes and oily tongue he held high the crystal cup, and made gallant speech, while his wife, at home, held a cup of another kind, from which she fed his second child with Melin's food. When, in glittering regimentals, the imperious conqueror proudly led his company on the march, the girl he had married, arrayed in a faded gown, helped to cook his dinner; and sometimes when not sewing or rocking the cradle, she watched him with loving eyes from the



lattice blind. Her pride in him was born of idolatrous love. In the grand military balls she would gladly have figured as a wall fixture in order to see and admire him, but she remembered that other women would share his attentions, and the thought was poison to her cup of joy. So she remained at home.

People did not wonder that she was neglected, for she received such attentions as were offered her with absolute indifference, while her eyes followed Wendell's every movement. This was not stimulating to masculine vanity, and her admirers soon found more appreciative company. Thus Theo became averse to society, and was far happier at home in anticipating her husband's coming, than in seeing him during his lordly reign.

On a certain military occasion Wendell, intoxicated by bright eyes and the pressure of soft hands, indulged in so much artillery punch and champagne that he lost his head as well as his heart. At two o'clock in the morning he swaggered into his home, where he was received with affectionate solicitude. Theo looked upon him with wonder, love and fear, for it was his first offense of the kind.

"Darling, are you ill?" she questioned.

"No—ah, no. Where are the kids?" he lisped, with the air of a devoted father, as he hung over the crib. He had never before held number two in his arms. Now he lifted it by the hem of the skirts, and slung it across his shoulder as if it were an empty sack. An upheaval of nature followed, and a stream of lac-



teal fluid ran down the back of his elegant uniform.

"Why, hubby darling!" cried Theo. She sprang to his side, and rescued her babe; then, regardless of its pitiful cries, she replaced it in the crib. "You are certainly delirious with fever, my hubby; your eyes are red and swollen, and your manner unnatural. What is the matter?" A great sob escaped her, and she began to weep softly. "Here is sand all over your coat—oh, dear! I shall 'phone for the doctor."

"No, you will not," Wendell commanded.

Suddenly she stared as though dumfounded. "Why, Rupert, here is a woman's lace handkerchief in your pocket. And here are long gloves. You seem to be laden with women's possessions." A look of horror overspread her face.

"If you don't like my appearance, I'll turn off the gas." With a subdued hiccough he extinguished the light, and she was left standing in darkness and dismay, while baby sobbed itself to sleep. Theo's perplexity vacillated between her husband's intoxicated condition and the souvenirs of his evening's pleasure. She relit the gas and again stood before him. He sank dejectedly on the side of the bed, and feeling his guilt, evidently wished to do penance.

"Dress yourself," he said, "and we'll call on Miss Flintof—fine old girl, that." His eyes were fast closing in sleep. His hair was dishevelled, and perspiration poured from his impish face.

"Miss Flintof!" repeated Theo, in blank amazement. "Oh, darling, what is the matter? Your dear, beautiful eyes are bruised and blackened."



"I punched a fellow because he tried to escort my girl home."

Theo's eyes flashed, and with an impatient stamp of her bare delicate foot, she exclaimed: "It looks more like a 'fellow' punched you, sir!"

"Oh, no; I had more punch than I could hold, so I poured it into him with this!" holding up his fist.

"Surely, you have not been fighting, Rupert? You are ill from an overworked brain. Get to bed, dear. Your burdens have been too heavy for you."

"Yes—'zactly; burdens," responded Wendell; "my head is too heavy for me." And this interesting member rolled from side to side in an affected manner, as he tried to wink at his reflection in a mirror.

Theo did not chide him; she removed his heavy uniform, and put him into bed as tenderly as though he were an infant. She bathed his swollen face, and watched over his heavy slumbers, trying to devise an excuse for his liquor-laden breath.

The next morning Theo lavished caresses on her prodigal husband, who, with big head and guilty conscience, was exceedingly deferential and affectionate. His agreeable moods were always hers, even when her rivals' fascinations had raised his spirits almost to hilarity. She would fondle him, and flatter herself that she was the instigator of his happiness. Love had gained so complete a mastery over her that she was its slave, and as such her hold upon her husband's affections was weakened.



## CHAPTER XXI.

## BEYOND THE CLOUDS.

A party of tourists departed from the Brevant in the month of July to ascend Mount Blanc. With the sturdy guides leading the way, and porters in attendance, the sure-footed mules started up the mountain incline. Cecil Dupree was perched picturesquely upon a sedate looking animal, while Barrymore and Lafay rode beside her. But this pleasure was short lived for Barrymore. Countess Duval, a vivacious beauty, declared that she was afraid to continue the daring adventure, unless reassured by his immediate presence. Her piquant face and roguish eyes turned their witchery upon him, while Lady Irving, her English friend, loftily commanded him to remain near her "ungovernable beast." So between the two ladies they managed to lure the young man from Cecil's side, and later the countess secured to herself and held the coveted prize, in defiance of rivalry.

Lafay persistently held his place beside Cecil, who, with unflinching courage, kept well in advance of the other ladies of the party. He watched her with intense admiration, in her graceful use of the alpenstock, and when opportunity offered, he availed himself of the bliss



of assisting her over rough passes. In the dense forests of fir and larch trees, and when on the sides of almost perpendicular walls of lichen-covered rocks, he was imbued with clinging tendencies—but it was not to the rocks he tried to cling. The murmur of the thread-like waterfalls, coursing musically to the valley below, thrilled his heart with strange palpitations. Through mazy passes, by roaring rapids, and in secluded vales, where nature reveled in luxuriant festoons, and made picturesque bowers from which even the sunlight was excluded, he lost no opportunity to vent his fiery ardor, which Cecil cooled at every gush. So he was forced to be content with silent adoration, and await an occasion more suited to her ladyship's wilful fancy.

The countess also felt the pangs of unrequited love. She wore a languishing air of sedateness, sighed frequently, and in dulcet tones appealed to Barrymore: "Ah, it is in scenes of this kind that love should find birth. Here a woman's soul would awaken to the call of love."

"Yes, Madam, the scene is inspiring," replied he, abstractedly. His eyes wandered from her pleading orbs to follow Cecil in the distance. He wondered if the young American girl was trifling with the Frenchman's affections, as Barrymore firmly believed she had been doing with those of Von Halz.

When Glacier des Bosson was reached the exertion of climbing presently ceased. The way was extremely rough, but afforded solid foothold. There were many crevasses, some of which could be stepped over, while others were



so deep and wide as to strike the beholder with terror. The fissures were changing constantly with the retreating or advancing motion of the glacier. When the party was further up the mountain a crash was heard, which sounded like the boom of artillery. The guides explained that it was caused by new cracks in the glacier over which they had passed.

At "*Les Grands Mulets*" a halt was made. The porters spread rugs, and when the party had formed a social circle wine and other refreshments were served. One of the guides, François Ducroz, told droll stories of ghostly carnival held on the heights at that season. François was powerfully built; years of training in mountain feats had made his sinews and muscles like bundles of wire. He stood on a jagged rock in the ice, and with the eye of an eagle looked up and waved his hat in the direction of Mt. Blanc's summit.

"Tombstone of thousands that are buried beneath its glaciers!" he cried. "The loud crashes heard in these parts are caused by malicious spirits which hurl down avalanches with the hope of burying the living who traverse the graves where the bodies of these ghosts lie wedged in the ice. When the moon shines from the east, shiveringly they glide in weird, fantastic dances over the glacier. Their pallid faces peep from dark crevasses, their voices shriek from hidden cliffs. What are called sudden gusts are the spirits which rush *en masse* in a shroud of snow, blind their victims, and dash the unfortunates



over crag and precipice. The 'Alpine echo' is their mocking laugh!"

The countess shivered, gave a little shriek, and nestled close beside Barrymore. Others of the party feigned belief in the gruesome story, and eagerly questioned the mysteries of mountain superstition.

Ducroz concluded by warning the tourists of the fatal sleep known in Alpine regions. "It comes when the unseen spirits lay their icy fingers on the traveler. Resist it! Fight it!" he shouted with wild gesture, as he paced restlessly over the crusted snow, scattering ice. "The ghosts turn the sun's rays into the fires of Hades and scorch their victims while on the ice."\*

Cecil was charmed with the novelty of adventure, as hour after hour she struggled onward and upward. Most of the ladies of the party were overcome by fear when borne aloft with ropes, but she passed through the experience with the glee of a child. She never grew weary until the grand plateau was reached, and she stood watching an avalanche in its downward sweep of destruction. Very soon after this a halt was made for the night at the "cabane," on the Arguille du Gouter.

At sunrise the ascension from the grand plateau was resumed. At *Les Petits Mulets* the ice was fissured, and extremely difficult to cross. Two guides preceded the party, and with their peolies dug footholds in the ice, while the other

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\*This superstition is due to the great heat upon the glaciers in fine weather.



ones were kept busy leading, steadying and lifting the ladies over dangerous places. The party now moved slowly, for rapid progress was not possible in this rare atmosphere.

Barrymore was an adept in the use of an ice-axe. He did not depend on the ropes, preferring Balmat's original way of climbing. He could scale the steep inclines almost with the agility of a mountain peasant. While at Refuge Vallot he gently broke through the meshes of captivity with which the countess had fettered him since the early hours of the climb, and with determination he moved warily in Cecil's direction. But the countess was not the woman to give up an advantage easily, and Lafay cleverly contrived to assist the lady.

"*Mon Dieu, Monsieur Barrymore!*" he cried, "*regardez la comtesse—elle est malade!*" He then rushed to Cecil's side, assumed an attitude of protection, and in his excitement performed almost an Indian war dance around her.

The countess, with the grace of an actress, had collapsed, and she gaspingly called for "Monsieur Barrymore!" who promptly obeyed the summons. He kneeled beside her, drew off her gloves, chafed her hands, and then administered a stimulant, regardless of strength or quantity. But the lady made no effort to recover from her languor, so he lifted her to a standing posture.

"Exert yourself, I entreat you, Madam!" he said sternly.

She closed her eyes; then, with a plaintive little sob, her head sank lightly upon his shoulder.



"Wait a minute," she pleaded. "I—am—so—tired."

Barrymore's face flushed crimson, and resolutely he resigned the willowy form to Lady Irving's care; then he rejoined Cecil.

"No right, monsieur, no right!" spoke Lafay; "I am Mademoiselle Dupree's escort."

Barrymore seemed neither to see nor to hear the Frenchman, and much to the fiery little fellow's annoyance, and the disappointment of the countess, Barrymore managed to hold his place beside Cecil as they neared the summit.

With a menacing gesture Lafay warned Cecil, in a stage whisper, "Zis will cause ze fight! Do you hear, ze fight!"

He hurriedly scribbled something on a card, presented it to Barrymore, and remarked: "*Affaire d'honneur, a l'outrance!*"

Barrymore looked him over, and good-naturedly replied: "*Guerre à mort, Dieu avec nous!*"

Lafay then betook himself to comfort the disconsolate countess, who had suddenly lost interest in the climb, and deplored her folly in undertaking so dangerous an adventure.

At last—at last Cecil stood alone with Barrymore in the observatory of Mount Blanc. The sun's slanting rays made gorgeously tinted rainbows below them, touching the crystal panorama with rare beauty and wonder. The dazzling snow contrasted vividly with the dark skies of the loftier regions. The young couple were above those mighty peaks, and formidable Arguilles le midi, l'Argentine le Geant; and far, far below were the fertile plains of Lombardy, in Italy, and



those of France. They viewed the cities and towns which, in the distance, seemed mere specks.

Cecil's climb had completely shaken down the wealth of her bright hair, and it fell in sweeping coils far below her waist, seeming to blaze about her like molten copper. Her childlike face was wreathed in smiles, and though her lips and face were slightly swollen, she was not disfigured by the trying atmosphere, as people often are when in that altitude. She felt a delicious thrill of happiness, a nameless charm exerted over her.

As Barrymore feasted his eyes on the glorious specimen of girlhood and womanhood combined he, too, felt that subtle enchantment which reason cannot define. When love speaks through the eyes its message is one of purity and peace; it receives its more earthly coloring when clothed in speech.

Barrymore's heart beat rapidly as he saw her face glow and soften under his smile. A vague dream of a future by her side, of days which she could fill with ecstasy made him forget all else but the exquisite creature before him. Stimulated by the beauty of the scene, the fine quality of the air, and the isolation of their position, he might have told her of his feelings; but at that moment the dreamers were interrupted by other members of the party, who joined them with commonplace exclamations of delight over the wonderful scenery below.

Later, in recalling the perilous events, and discussing with Barrymore the glories of the adventure, Cecil laughingly remarked: "What a peculiar effect the atmosphere of great altitudes has



upon the mind. It clothes everything with romance, and even invests a peasant guide with picturesque and sentimental heroism."

Barrymore regarded the girl steadfastly, and his face darkened. "The manly guide," he replied earnestly, "would have been an improvement on your very insignificant display of the French soldiery. The chap bade me fall in line to the challenge of his tin sword yesterday; and, armed with a keen little switch, I went forth to battle."

Strangely alike were the independent and intrepid spirits of Cecil and Barrymore. Had he been a man of weaker will he would not have commanded her admiration. But while she recognized the strength of his masterful nature, she knew his sympathies to be as tender as those of a woman. In short, she had found her ideal man, and the revelation set her at enmity with herself.



## CHAPTER XXII.

## A FRENCHMAN'S WOOING.

Cecil was in a constant glow of enthusiasm over her magnificent scenic surroundings. She loved nature in these large and rugged phases, and she felt that she would enjoy solitude among the white glacial sweeps. To make the ascension of a summit unattended she knew was impossible; but to cross the Mer de Glace without a guide suggested to her fearless nature a pleasant adventure.

The night was a dream of loveliness as she looked from her balcony to the peaks and needles. The moon's rays fell upon the heights with an Alpine glow, so bewitching and delicate as to appeal in a startling way to the imagination. While under the spell of enchantment she quietly gave the night clerk orders for the following day, advised Madam Bellot that she would be off for an early climb, and would not return until afternoon. She then made her preparations for the trip and retired.

While Chamouni still lay in silence, and shadows of night were giving way to the flush of dawn, Cecil departed for her solitary escapade, and daylight found her well out of the town. Her animal carried her carefully along, as if



realizing his responsibility. After hours of steady climbing the glittering sea of ice opened to her view. She found the cabane where previously she had left her mule. Here she dismounted, secured him, and hastened away before she was seen by the peasants.

The sun gleams turned the Mer de Glace into a crystalline sea of flashing gems. Elated and charmed with her freedom, the girl sprang forward on her upward course, but not in the direction she had taken before. Her eyes were lifted to the gem-studded towers above her, which had witnessed the passing of centuries. They seemed to her exhilarated fancy the very doorsteps to Paradise itself, as they lured her onward with their beckoning fingers.

"Oh, it is so wonderful—so wonderful!" she cried aloud, flinging wide her arms, and bursting into joyous song. But when Mount Blanc, grim and sullen, obscured his hoary head in dark clouds, as if in solemn warning, a feeling of awe stole over the girl. Still she gave no thought to the danger of the situation; nor did she realize that in these regions directions which are apparently so easily followed, are very delusive. But at length it dawned upon her that she had lost her way, and her peril presented itself to her with all its horror. She stood still for a moment, overcome by a feeling of helplessness. Then, mastering her alarm, she bravely endeavored to retrace her footsteps—to find some imprint in the glacier by which to regain her lost course. But each attempt proved a failure. A crevasse on one side, a horrible fissure on the other



stopped her passage. Every step took her into craggy edges of ice. She wandered aimlessly for what seemed to her a very long time, and then she began to shiver, and soon became numbed with cold. The fatal drowsiness known to those who have been exposed to similar peril overpowered her. No amount of will power could resist its frigid hold, and as she struggled onward, death seemed to tighten a relentless grip upon her, and she sank beneath it.

Cecil did not die; she recovered consciousness to find herself in a peasant's cabane, with the family around her. In their excitement they had used cogent restoratives, and had given full fling to their superstitious ideas of treating such cases. Half dazed, Cecil imagined that she was at the mercy of savages, with whom resistance would be of little avail. But her splendid vitality soon began to reassert itself, and her head cleared when she heard a loud rap on the door. It was opened hastily, and Barrymore appeared on the scene, wearing a stern and worried look. Intuitively the peasants understood, and left him alone with Cecil.

"Why did you do this imprudent thing?" he asked, bending over her in a tender, caressing way. His warm breath on her cheek seemed to give her new life, while his reproachful eyes searched her secret thoughts. Involuntarily his face nestled down to hers, and the electric thrill of his touch aroused her completely.

"Did you dare to follow me?" she asked.

"I dared to come to the Mer de Glace."

She made a slight effort to free herself from



his mesmeric touch, and, as a dainty flush swept over her face, and her pulses quickened, he fancied that he saw in true perspective life, love and joy.

Cecil felt humiliated because of her adventure's defeat; and the fact that he had witnessed it wounded her pride. Furthermore, she suffered a pang of disappointment when she was told that not Barrymore, but a peasant guide had dragged her away from danger in a most ungraceful fashion.

At three o'clock, with Barrymore as her escort, she was ready to commence the journey back to Chamouni. The two rode in reserved silence for some time, and then Cecil was the first to speak.

"How did you, Mr. Barrymore, chance to be here this morning? It was a remarkable coincidence."

"A providential happening that the brave guide went to your rescue, and that I am here to see you safely home," he replied evasively. He did not inform her that he had witnessed her lonely departure from Chamouni and, fearful that she would fall into danger, had watched her progress through the telescope; and that when he saw her heading for the Mer de Glace, he had followed with all possible speed. Digressing from the point she wished to gain, he earnestly requested her never again to be so reckless. "Promise, will you?" he questioned.

"I do promise never again to be so imprudent," she replied; and when she thanked him for his kindly interest her voice thrilled him.



She held out her hand, and a tremulous movement of her chin betrayed her emotion.

Barrymore did not take the offered hand, but regarded her steadfastly. "I think that you need a guide in more places than mountain passes, Miss Dupree. You are wilful and inexperienced. Why are you masquerading as an heiress?" he asked abruptly.

Cecil drew a quick breath, and her face went pale; but her pride was equal to the emergency. With flashing eyes, and a dawn of crimson on her cheeks, she coldly questioned: "Were you disappointed when your curiosity was satisfied? Is that the cause of your recent—indifference—to—me?" Her lips curved in scorn, and her voice became choked.

"Possibly—that—is — the — reason," drawled Barrymore, as a sarcastic smile overspread his face. "With me, Miss Dupree, your secret is safe—your prospect for winning a title unimpeached. The love of your bloated adorer, Von Halz, is sincere, although your reputed wealth may have its inducements for him. A happy future, and my hearty congratulations."

"Thanks," responded Cecil vehemently. "Of course his love is sincere. And, Douglas Barrymore, I hate you! We shall never be friends. Your sarcastic taunts are beneath a gentleman, sir."

When the couple arrived in Chamouni, Lafay and Von Halz were strutting up and down the terrace in opposite directions, evidently in suspense at Cecil's long absence, and ready to pay knee tribute at the first glimmer of her smile.



But there was no light in her eye for them as she rode slowly up the driveway. Her pale face bore evidence to her angry, unhappy spirit.

A deep sense of pain and disappointment stirred within the breast of Barrymore. "If she had only denied the charge!" he groaned inwardly. For the first time jealousy swept over him with volcanic fury as he saw the count approaching Cecil. She deliberately beckoned to the delighted Von Halz, who, with all the glory of victory written on his sunset countenance, accelerated his toddling footsteps. This preference set Lafay to prancing up and down, as a refractory pony. When Von Halz reached her side and affectionately held out his arms to Cecil, Barrymore muttered "Fool!" and pushed him aside with one firm jostle.

Cecil was startled by the determination in Barrymore's angry eyes, and in the tone of his voice. She felt his complete mastery, and allowed him to lift her to the ground.

"Forgive me, Eidelweiss, my Alpine flower!" he whispered tenderly.

With undefined emotions of joy and pain the girl fled to the privacy of her own apartments.

At dinner Barrymore seemed in unusually gay spirits. He gave his entire attention to the appreciative Countess Duval, whom he afterward escorted to a rustic bench in the courtyard. From her window Cecil could see them under the trees, where they sat in earnest conversation. The green lights reflected on them made a pretty picture, but Cecil found no pleasure in the sight. She crossed the room, and from another window



looked away to the far peaks and needles, and watched their impenetrable shadows in the valleys below. But the tranquility of those lofty regions brought no peace to her perturbed mind.

"Those wretched jewels!" she said to herself. "I wish that I had never seen them. Why did Madam Bellot represent me as her heiress? Oh, horrible!" She hurried to the piano, where she sat idly composing weird strains of melody. She felt a yearning for some presence, and then blushed. "What are you calling for, oh my heart?" she softly questioned.

A gentle rap on the door caused her to start guiltily. But there was joy in her voice as she called, "Entrez!" The door opened, and Lafay came forward, making the young lady a profound military obeisance.

"*Bon soir, mademoiselle; comment vous portez-vous?*"

"*Bon soir, monsieur; très bien, merci,*" replied Cecil, with chill dignity.

With the quick grace of the Frenchman, Lafay raised Mademoiselle's hand to his lips, then clung to it as if the sweetness of its touch intoxicated him. "*Coeur de mon coeur!*" he cried.

"*Parlez Anglaise,*" she interrupted, withdrawing her hand.

"I once more fall before you. Resist my pleadings no longer. I die of despair at your indifference. I soar on wings of rapture at your smile. Stop—listen—you shall!" he cried, once more possessing himself of her hand. "Hear me while I pour out to you my undying love!" He knelt in theatrical humility.



"Reserve your ardor for a more responsive woman, I implore you!" exclaimed Cecil impatiently. "It is wasted here, and I entreat you to desist." She retreated a step, regarding him with cold eyes and a haughty smile.

"Let me die here," he whispered excitedly, "rather than live elsewhere."

"Get up," said Cecil, imperiously.

Slowly he arose, and stood for a moment in silence, shaken by a storm of passion. He then caught his breath, held out his arms, and again burst forth: "Come to ze heart zat is bursting wiz love for you, my darling!" he almost screamed, reaching for her. His breast heaved until the stiff plastrons of gold on his coat glistened under the chandelier.

Cecil made a movement as if to go from the room, but Lafay sprang to the door.

"One moment, for God's sake!" he entreated; and then, in his fascinating way and musical accents he once more poured forth in rapid eloquence the burden of his love, while with every word he edged nearer to the object of his devotion.

"Are you mad?" cried Cecil excitedly, drawing herself away in forbidding dignity. "Stop where you are, Monsieur; do not come a step nearer." He paused and looked at her, astonished by her determination. "Forgive me if I pain you, Monsieur. I thank you for the honor you confer, but I do not love you—cannot love you—will not love you. I can never be more to you than a dream."

Powerless to resist her enchantment, he turned



aside, and indulged in a childlike burst of tears. His recent flow of eloquence had almost exhausted the reserve force of his brain. As a last resort he unsheathed an imaginary sword, and swore vengeance upon the man who should succeed in winning what he had lost. "Lost!" he repeated, as he swayed backward, and raised his hands to his temples, as though his sufferings were unbearable. "To slay my rival would solace this black hour of unutterable woe!"

"Jack the giant killer," heartlessly observed Cecil, smiling mischievously as she recalled Barrymore's description of the duel.

"*Oui*, Mademoiselle, scoff if you will!" he cried in his frenzy, scarcely responsible for what he said. "I stand before you ze grandfazer of a cavalier of ze ancient régime. My glory is to maintain zer dignity and bravery; and my boast and pride is in our conqueror, Napoleon, whose equal in history is unknown. I feel honored—even to stand guard over his sacred ashes!"

"Good for his peace of mind that he cannot awaken and see you," sighed the sarcastic girl.

Lafay loved in a mad, wild fashion, but he could be as loyal to the cause of his country as he was to that of his lady love; and her hint at the deterioration of Napoleon's soldiers went like a sword thrust to his pride and patriotism. With electric flashes from his dark eyes, and without further parley, he bowed himself out of the room, rushed wildly to his apartment, packed his effects, and the next morning found him on his way to Paris.

Von Halz soon followed, his mercenary air-castles tumbled into a pitiful wreck.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

## FAREWELL TO EIDELWEISS.

Throughout the valley of Chamouni, and on the heights beneath the snow line, the autumnal tints were merged into gorgeous colors. Tourists were departing, for the season was drawing toward its close.

Cecil stood on the balcony of her room one afternoon at sunset. A joyous sparkle was in her eyes, and the softest flush was on her cheeks. Had she questioned herself as to the cause of her happiness she might have found an answer which her pride would deny. An hour previous, as she sang softly to the piano accompaniment, she had felt a presence; and when she turned to look, Barrymore stood beside her. When she ceased singing he took her hands in his, and bent over her. His voice was full of mellow music, and his expressive eyes spoke volumes of affection. Cecil had found herself growing weak in the warmth of his overpowering magnetism, and with a deprecating gesture she had hurriedly withdrawn from his presence.

"There is to be an impromptu dance at the Beau-Rivage to-night, Cecil," Madam Bellot reminded the girl. "Remember that you have promised to attend, and you have given no



thought as to what you will wear. Positively, you are the most indifferent child to your personal appearance that ever lived. Your ambition never soars beyond neatness."

"Oh, anything will do," replied Cecil abstractedly.

"'Anything' will not do," corrected Madam. "I must insist on your wearing that Venetian lace over rose silk; and for ornaments there are the diamonds which we have recently had reset with pearls."

In a moment Cecil was aroused. "No more jewels—no more sailing under false colors for me, dear Madam," she replied. "I will to-night appear in my own poverty-stricken personality. I will wear my chiffon gown; and, instead of jewels, I will wear flowers—wild flowers, at that—those dainty blue forget-me-nots which sprinkle the valley and hillside."

Madam Bellot knew full well that entreaty would avail nothing, so after a few groans and sighs, she became reconciled.

Cecil was the incarnation of purity and beauty in her snowy gown, with sweeping train. Her plump arms were revealed from her shoulders, and her rounded neck was bare. Madam Bellot had provided her with an abundance of lilies of the valley, which she wore in lieu of the wild blossoms. When, with her chaperon, she appeared in the salon, she entered naturally into the gayeties with all the buoyancy of youth.

Barrymore came late, and the evening was far spent when he approached Cecil, after he had made a social round of the salon, in his natural,



easy manner. Cecil thought that he seemed indifferent to her presence. She felt piqued by his neglect, and glanced often in his direction. That they were to part that night recurred to her with startling suggestiveness. When, at length, in company with a stranger he drew near, she breathed a covert sigh of relief.

"Miss Dupree," he said, "my friend, Lieutenant Reed, of the U. S. N., desires an introduction to you. May I present him?" Soon after this Barrymore bowed, and gave place to the stranger.

Cecil touched Barrymore's arm with her fan. "You have not asked me to dance with you, Mr. Barrymore," she said, "and I have only two vacancies on my card. I feel that I owe you some concession for your bravery in the Mer de Glace incident."

"Is that the reason you would dance with me?" He looked at her sternly. She smiled, and handed him her card. He wrote his name for the closing dance, and walked away with the countess, who hovered near.

Cecil heard the lieutenant's flattering speeches in rather an indifferent manner, until Barrymore's name was mentioned, when she became more interested.

"At two o'clock," said the lieutenant, "Barrymore and I go with a student party for a glorious climb to the summit of Mount Blanc. It will be my first ascent of that peak; but for him it will be no novelty."

"How I envy you!" exclaimed Cecil, delightedly.



"Envy me—what?" teasingly inquired her companion; "my climb, or my friend?"

"Why, your climb, of course?" she said shaking her head, and trying to frown severely; but the flush that dyed her cheeks betrayed her confusion.

"Your blush is bewitching, Miss Dupree, and keeps me wondering which you really did mean."

"Be careful," she advised unconcernedly, "for danger surrounds every footstep as you near the summit."

"Oh, I don't regard the ascent as so extremely perilous, nor do I make my will before I start, as was a custom in the olden time," he laughed.

The band struck up a two-step.

"This is our dance," said the lieutenant, and away they glided.

The final waltz began dreamily, its music forming a bitterly sweet memory for coming days. Barrymore was on hand. "Shall we dance?" he asked, as he looked toward the inviting seats outside.

"Oh, please!" replied Cecil.

He concealed his disappointment. But as he placed his arm about her, it trembled slightly. "Anywhere to be with her," he thought; for with his closing opportunity pride refused to veil the one desire of his heart.

When the music ceased the usual stir of leave-taking buzzed throughout the rooms. Barrymore led Cecil through the conservatory, and out beyond the terrace among the trees. The night was throbbing with rapture. The full moon soared high in the heavens, dimming the light of



the stars, and radiating a mystic glow over the surrounding peaks. The rhythmic rush of the Arve over its rocky bed filled the night with music. The air was languorously laden with nature's mingled perfumes. Near the bridge where first he had seen Cecil, Barrymore paused.

"Here," he said, "we will linger for a moment, and say good-bye. I could not part with you in the glare of the salon, because I wish to remember you as I see you in nature's light, my sweet Alpine flower. Pardon me, but that name suits you. You seem to thrive in an atmosphere of ice." There was a touch of melancholy on his fine face, and his eyes were wistful as they searched Cecil's face. She hung her head and absently toyed with the flowers she wore.

"I leave for our climb within the next hour," Barrymore continued. "I shall not see you again, as Reed and I shall start immediately for Geneva upon our return to Chamouni. I would ask you a question—much depends on your reply. Is our parting to be forever, or is it to be of short duration?" There was a burning light in his eyes as the last words escaped his lips.

Cecil sighed almost inaudible, and remained silent.

"Words are unnecessary if you will look into my eyes, Eidelweiss, and let yours reply." He waited, but not even a glance stimulated his hopes. "I am waiting, dear heart. Shall I, on the threshold of the mystic real of love, stand defeated?"

In the white glow of the moon Cecil stood like



a marble statue. No voluntary movement disturbed her cold reserve. Her filmy wrap slipped from her shoulders, and displayed their tempting loveliness. He fancied that he detected a slight heaving of her softly throbbing bosom, and that her warm blood pulsed visibly through her red, chaste lips. A world of yearning looked from her starry eyes as she watched the glittering peaks. Her silence was maddening, but Barrymore controlled his pride as he did his great passion for the girl. Her unresponsive manner enhanced the value of the happiness he craved. She was deliciously tempting, as the unattainable always is to man.

"See, Mount Blanc frowns upon your silence," said Barrymore, for suddenly the summit of that wonderful mountain was obscured by a pall of black clouds, while none others were to be seen in the moonlit skies. A shiver passed over Cecil as she gazed upon it.

"Good-bye, Miss Dupree. I am detaining you in the chill air." He held out his hand in a resolute manner.

"Good-bye," she faltered, as she gave him her fingers.

He drew her cape around her, offered her his arm, and slowly they passed down the mazy path. Then, at the steps, she whispered a lingering, low good-night, which meant good-bye forever.

Later, from her window, Cecil watched the party gather on the terrace, saw the guides approach, and heard Barrymore's familiar voice. How strangely musical it sounded. She could



see him now. His cap was pushed back from his brow, and as he lighted his cigar his face for a moment was turned toward her window. With feelings of sadness and yearning she watched him while he mounted and rode away, and until he was lost to sight.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

## A GRAVE IN ALPINE SNOW.

Apparently, Barrymore was the jolliest member of the party. He strove determinedly to banish all thoughts of bewitching Cecil. "Absence will soon obliterate the memory of this mysterious dream," he told himself. And under the poignant pangs of wounded pride he succeeded in holding the mastery of his emotions.

The following day, toward sunset, when the party halted for rest at Petits Mulets, his thoughts reverted with bitterness to the time when he had stood with Cecil in this same spot. "How glorious the scene was then!" he thought; "and now? Oh, why did her sweet eyes tell me the old story, when she did not intend to give me her heart?"

These sad musings were interrupted by a guide, who in a loud voice proclaimed, "Weather aloft is bad!"

Very soon there was a gust of snow. Clouds of midnight blackness settled over the summit, and then as suddenly broke in rifts, and revealed it. This warning decided the guides to retreat with the tourists to a refuge below, until the strange atmospheric vagaries should subside. But a heavy snow cloud overtook and burst upon



them with such great violence that their progress was impeded and their tracks obliterated. Then a snow-bank slid down the mountain side, so dense as to obscure the surroundings. With blinded vision the travelers tried to move slowly and cautiously, but some of the men took a direction too near the edge of the cliff, and at the moment a guide shouted to warn them of their danger an unobserved snow bridge beneath them gave way with a roaring, grinding crash, and they were hurled down, down over crag and precipice. The snow gully arose in tremendous clouds, enveloping the falling men's forms, then returned in a hissing downpour, leaving behind a spiral mist, which vanished in vapory clouds.

Lieutenant Reed was dazed with horror. Never had roar of cannon, nor flash of steel, nor ghastly carnage struck such terror to his heart as did that appalling disaster in its merciless disregard of human life.

When the snow cloud was partly spent, and the scattered crowd brought together, it was found that five of the tourists were lost. The lieutenant gazed and listened for what he dreaded most to see and hear: Barrymore, his bosom friend, was among the missing.

No time was wasted. With heroic effort the guides and the remainder of the party undertook to follow as closely as possible in the wake of the disaster; but little progress could be made. Three of the guides descended from where the ice bridge had given way. They saw the traces of the men's rapid fall; they approached the edges of the yawning crevasses, on their hands



and knees; they shouted, but no answer came from the deep ice pits. The wind howled, and the snow circled around them in blinding torrents, threatening to cover them with its voluminous mantle. At length they resigned all hope of recovering the bodies of the doomed men, and sadly they turned their footsteps toward Chamouni.

That town was in a state of excitement, for through the great telescope the fatal fall had been witnessed—another disaster added to the list which keeps dark the annals of Mount Blanc.

Cecil received the dreadful tidings with wonderful calmness. To her they were too sad for words or tears. With white face she retired to the solitude of her chamber. The effort to conceal her feelings stifled her, and in the silence of midnight, with eyes burning and sleepless, she planned for an immediate departure from Chamouni. The next morning she conferred with Madam Bellot, who approved the suggestion.

"The fearful accident has unnerved you, Cecil; for wasn't Mr. Barrymore a very dear friend of yours?" she asked.

"Yes—yes," murmured Cecil, but no other confession escaped her lips.

The last evening of her stay in Chamouni Cecil sat alone at twilight. Her head ached, and her temples throbbed to bursting. Vainly she strove to forget. Barrymore's sad, reproachful eyes haunted her. Remorse shrieked in her ears. With a shudder she tried to turn from its merciless cries. The burden of unshed tears was intolerable.



As she sat in dumb agony there arose on the evening air a woman's sweet voice, which in subdued, almost sobbing accents, sang:

“Could ye come back to me, Douglas,  
In the old likeness that I knew,  
I would be so faithful, so loving,  
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true.”

It was Countess Duval singing. With Cecil the conflict was over. Tears, soothing and unrestrained, coursed down her cheeks and fell on her clasped hands. When she arose and threw open the blinds, Mount Blanc, in its chill grandeur, seemed mightier and sterner than ever. The Arve did not sound gentle and musical to Cecil, as of yore. It was a fierce little messenger from glacial seas, bearing warning and despair in its hurried babble. All nature seemed hard and cruel.

“Farewell, Douglas,” she whispered, “in a strange land I leave you. Friendship was weaving a chain of fairest flowers, which Fate has severed; and though dead and faded, they will ever garland the grave within my heart.”

But Cecil tried bravely to stifle her anguish. She felt that to allow it to overwhelm her would be weak and selfish. She turned her thoughts to Madam Bellot, and noted that the old lady's health had been materially benefited by the sojourn in Chamouni. The Madam had come to the conclusion that she had not outlived her usefulness. For her there were no more idle days of discontent and repining. She was beginning



to take a human interest in the joys and sorrows of others; and in the performance of thoughtful, kindly deeds from time to time, her own ills were forgotten.

"Until I met you, dear child," she said to Cecil upon one occasion, "I did not know how to live. Before I learned to blush for shame at my own Godless existence my soul was full of conflict. With the majority of people I was selfish, and when I was sated with pleasure the world became a wilderness of emptiness and unrest. My wealth could not procure happiness—not even contentment. Ah, I turn with a shudder from the picture of my own morbid imagination to the peaceful and comforting one drawn for me by your purity and faith."

So Cecil was comforted. And the promise made her pupils decided her to sink her sorrow in the pursuit of her work among them.

Once more she found herself in Campville. There Madam Bellot also spent much of her time, taking an interest in all that concerned people less fortunate than herself. In an unostentatious way she did a noble work in that byway of the world, where charity's wild rush to the relief of foreign needs had left unrelieved pitiable cases of ignorance and suffering at home.

No change had come to sleepy Campville during the travelers' absence, except that the parochial flock now had no shepherd. The lamented Clayborn, while away on his summer's vacation, had taken unto himself a wife, and upon her arrival in the village his glory waned, his power weakened. The hearts and pocketbooks of his



feminine worshippers were no longer as they had been, and having gained experience by seeing others of his profession suffer from the folly of matrimony, he decided not to tarry until the bitter dregs must be drunk. When he had gone the faults which his parishioners had once refused to find in him stood glaringly magnified; and many a woman made her whispered boast that Clayborn had been rejected by her as a suitor because of his worldly mindedness.

Miss Malvin never rallied from her over-exertion in the clerical chase. Her face grew more sallow and hard, and her eyes became as cold as steel. Her whole aspect was that of a purple autumn blossom after the chill breath of King Frost has quenched its vitality.



## CHAPTER XXV.

## PETTY ANNOYANCES.

Months lengthened into years. In the Wendell home five children had been born, one of which died in its early infancy. Rupert, the eldest—called “Pert”—when six years old bore a striking resemblance to his father; he was handsome, reckless, fond of fun, and every ready to fight. Next came the twins, Flintof and Ralph. They, too, were headstrong, but truthful and full of generous impulses. Baby Lillian was the sunshine of the home. She was always amiable and smiling, except when the boys treated her rudely; then her tender heart would send forth a touching little sob. Her winsome smile, and the joyous expression of her violet eyes were a challenge to love. Her father declared that she was a cherub, and should not be contaminated by the example of the unruly boys.

Theo found much comfort and happiness in her children. They helped to wile away many a weary hour when she knew that her husband was seeking his pastimes away from home.

But now a certain anniversary of their wedding was approaching, and he had promised to remain by her side for the evening. With the hope of reviving within him sweet memories of



the olden time she wore her wedding gown and bride roses on her bosom. Eagerly she listened for his familiar footstep that night, and was ready to perform any act that love or humility could suggest, for her aspiration never rose above a position in his service. She sat beside the window where, in former years, she had been wont to await his coming. The hours slipped away, as in mute patience she hoped and watched; but he came not. Like a deathblow to her desires the clock struck eleven. She arose with a sigh of disappointment and went to the nursery, where she sought comfort in admiring her children. Then, from an upper window, she once more peered into the darkness.

"The evening is over," she murmured sadly. "Oh, dear, will it always be loneliness and waiting?"

At last she heard a footstep on the stairway, and in a moment Theo's arms were around her husband's neck. She did not reproach him, nor show her disappointment as she had done in times past, for she was trying to perfect herself in life's grandest lesson—that of suffering in silence and living for another.

"Oh, hubby, I am delighted that you have come," she said.

Wendell kissed the upturned face, and then hastened into the bedroom. "No time for slippers and easy chair to-night, Theo. I am worn out, and must retire. I regret that I was unable to keep my engagement with you, dear."

Theo battled with herself, although the tears choked her voice. "If he would only see that I



have dressed for his coming, and say one word of love to me." He did not, however; but, with the speed of a fire engine horse, he stepped out of his harness and rolled into bed. Slowly the aggrieved wife removed the rosebuds from her hair and folded away the gown in which she had arrayed herself with so much care.

Before she had finished putting away Wendell's scattered trappings he snored. That was the *coup de grâce*. Good resolutions, and the patient self-training of years were forgotten, as tears coursed down the wife's cheeks. The snores wounded her; they suggested indifference and the decadence of love. Her grief did not appeal to the sleeper, and soon he was disturbed by two warm little hands fondling his face, and a soft voice questioning: "Is your home distasteful to you, Rupert? Tell me truly if you have grown weary of me?"

"Thunder!" cried Wendell, in a resonant voice. Then he partly awoke, and testily asked: "What is the matter, Theo? You remind me of a screech owl, always making your plaintive moan at night. Go to sleep."

"Hubby, dear, you don't seem to love your home. Aunt Charlotte says that when a man finds outside resources for pleasure that's the end——"

"Damn Aunt Charlotte!" he interrupted emphatically, as he turned over, and once more gave himself to slumber.

With eyes sad and wakeful Theo sat bolt upright in bed. She recalled the time when he, her lover, had watched and waited on the balcony for



a glimpse of her, or even a wave of her little hand. Sleep did not then encroach upon the sweetness of their waking dream. In those days he had called her his "little dove"; and now—oh, horror! to be called an "owl!" In gloomy solitude she brooded, until finally she sank back exhausted upon her pillow, and morning found her still weakly craving sympathy.

Miss Flintof made an early call, and tried to supply the article desired by Theo's heart. She was primed with a tray of sweetmeats and a quantity of well-meaning advice.

"You are going to pieces fast, my child," said the spinster, as she removed her bonnet. "How worn and pallid you are! Yes, actually killing yourself with worry about that abandoned husband of yours."

"Ah," sighed Theo, "I fear that Rupert and I are not equally mated."

"Pity if you were," retorted Miss Flintof; "his mate is not at large."

"I mean that Rupert deserves a stronger woman—one with more sparkle and dash than I have."

"Yes, indeed; one strong enough to dash him out of the window when he staggers in drunk after midnight."

"Oh, Aunt Charlotte, you prefer to misunderstand me," pleaded Theo.

"God will hold you responsible for the temptation you allow your husband to fall into night after night," responded Aunt Charlotte, shaking a warning finger. "He spends his time upon the clubroom's degrading vices, such as the gaming



table, or else strolling around with women of sporty habits."

"You really don't think anything so terrible as that!" cried Theo, as she grasped Miss Flintof's hand. "My husband is above reproach, and so extremely popular."

"Above nothing!" corrected Miss Flintof. "If he is popular, his wife should share his popularity, as she does his cares and labors. If Wendell had a strong wife he would soon be convinced of his perverted ways, and possibly would be saved from being inveigled into everlasting perdition by unlawful loves."

This invidious speech made a lasting impression upon Theo's mind, as she sat there in torture; for she considered the spinster a world of knowledge.

Could the victim of Miss Flintof's fury have been near the result of her speech might have been disastrous; but he was working in his office, at peace with the world.

Theo's face expressed solemn thought and unutterable sadness as prayerfully she weighed the matter. "What would you advise, Aunt Charlotte? I will confess to you that in silence I have endured mental torture—almost despair." She drew a long breath, and waited as a prisoner before the bar awaits his death sentence.

"That's right, you poor down-trodden woman, confess it all!" said Miss Flintof, encouragingly, as she nodded approval, and edged nearer.

"That is all. I only fear, you understand, that Rupert's love has grown cold."



"Forbid him to prowl around at night, and if he disobeys you, follow him—watch him!"

"I would sooner sever my right arm from my body than do anything so contemptible," declared Theo, her eyes flashing with scornful indignation.

"Well, just as you like," retorted the irate woman, "but I tell you that men are allowed too much latitude nowadays. Marriage is only a pseudonym for their secret and widespread amours."

"Oh, you will kill me!" exclaimed Theo, wringing her hands.

"Can't help it. Truth is mightier than error, and will be heard. The woman who bears the name of wife is chiefly a domestic necessity; and after a year of wedded life, the only way that she can induce a smile or word of praise from her husband is when she has satisfied his appetite by some remarkable feat with the frying pan, or else indulged his purse by renovating her old duds from last season. For such he will encourage her thrift, and praise her economy; then, when he sees her among well-dressed women, he will compare her shabby and gone-to-pieces condition with their smart appearance, to her everlasting disadvantage."

"On this subject we cannot agree," cried Theo, with spirit; "and I fear that your influence is doing me no good."

"Still, when your dissolute husband falls short of his duty, your telltale face implores counsel from me. My unpalatable assertions are founded upon previous investigation; and when the



crisis comes, you will understand that man is unworthy of woman's love."

Theo did not approve Miss Flintof's prophecies; but, like ghost stories, they fascinated her. She gave earnest thought to the matter, and decided that in order to shield her husband from temptation she must resume her social duties and figure as his guardian angel. She sat in deep revery when Wendell came in to dinner.

"Hurry up, please," he said; "I have an appointment at three o'clock; my time is limited."

The children crowded around and attempted to climb upon his lap. He eased off from them as though they were reptiles.

"Here, nurse," he called; "take the children out. How untidy you keep them. Pert smells like a wet dog on a rainy day."

With his handkerchief he wiped off a chair and took a seat at the table. A hubbub ensued, for the little ones refused to go from the room. As an inducement Theo placed a basket of red apples on the veranda, and away the youngsters scampered.

"Watch them, nurse," she said, as she ran quickly from the dining room to the kitchen, too busy to see Pert place an apple on Flintof's head, and with a vigorous swing of a toy sword try to slice it in two parts. Deafening yells of pain and wrath recalled her to the scene of disturbance.

"If you have any time for me," Wendell called above the noise, "remember that I am waiting for my dinner."

"Yes, dear, in a minute," replied Theo. She



held a wet towel on Flintof's wounded head with one hand, while she made a prisoner of Pert with the other.

"If the soup is hot, I can't wait for it to cool," came from the impatient man.

"I will cool it for you, hubby," Theo replied sweetly. "It is oxtail soup, and extra fine." She then turned to the indolent nurse. "Keep order here," she commanded, "or I will discharge you this very day." With Flintof weeping in her arms she went in and served her husband. The butler was a luxury of the past, and the poorly paid cook was so untidy in appearance that she was not allowed in the dining room.

Several dishes were curtly refused by Wendell. This distressed his anxious wife, and caused her to wear a repentant look, and respond with the menial submission that wives of her kind display when bullied by an impatient husband.

When dinner was over she meekly tripped upstairs behind him, laid out his linen, changed his shirt buttons, prepared his shaving apparatus; and then he grunted out appreciatively:

"I wish to gracious that you could shave me."

"Oh, how I would love to! Do let me try."

"No, I guess I'd better not; you might cut me."

Theo turned pale at the mere suggestion of such a calamity. She stood by and watched the process, handing him every article required until finished.

"Where is my diamond stud?" Wendell stirred the orderly drawer into confusion as he spoke.



"Not there, hub; here it is, in your jewelry case."

"I can never find anything when I want it. Where is my new tie?" He emptied the mouchoir case on the dresser. Dainty perfume arose from the tumbled heap.

"Here it is, darling, in the proper place. You should have learned all this long ago," laughed Theo. She then removed a soiled towel from the silken drapery on the mantel where he had carelessly thrown it. He had long intended to overcome his boyish disregard of order, and adapt himself to ways of neatness; but, like most men, he was "forever on the brink of being born."

"Aunt Charlotte thinks that I neglect you, Rupert——"

"For once she has had a rational thought," interrupted Wendell.

"Inasmuch as I never accompany you in your social rounds, dear."

"Pshaw! Since your matchless aunt missed the coveted privilege of rocking a cradle she should be occupied in sewing on rag mats, instead of nagging at married people. One look into her savage face is enough to make a fellow crawl in his shoes."

In the ensuing days Theo found time in her busy life to create some dainty costumes for evening wear; and when she expressed a desire to accompany her husband abroad he obligingly escorted her to *soirée* and reception. But invariably their homecoming was marked by sore trial.

The nurse once smuggled her own woolly-



headed youngster into the nursery, stretched herself on the children's bed, and with her baby hanging to her breast, she dropped into that profound slumber known best to her race, while the children held high carnival at midnight. Rupert cut off Lillian's curls on one side, and blackened her cheeks with shoe polish. He locked Flintof and Ralph in the closet while playing prisoner, and there they wept themselves to sleep on the cold floor. He then robed the pickaninny in his mother's wedding gown—her dearest treasure—and laid it in his father's place in bed. He exhausted himself with frolicsome pranks, while the nurse slept the sleep of the just.

"It is the result of your neglect of duty, Theo," declared Wendell, in icy tones, as he surveyed the scene. "The idea of a mother leaving her children to the mercy of a negro is outrageous." He then betook himself to the quiet of a spare room, where he slept until morning.

For the remaining hours of the night the mother watched over Ralph, who was threatened with a case of croup. She grieved over the child's indisposition, and reproached herself for the annoyance her husband had suffered. She was wounded by his coldness, and his indifference to her distress. His ideas were hers, however; she concluded that a mother's proper sphere was within the limits of the household and nursery, and that her love for her husband should hold him above suspicion in her mind. This she afterward hinted to Miss Flintof, while unreservedly blaming herself.

"Aha, aha!" nodded the spinster, "show the



white feather, and your future will be all desolation and cruel neglect." Her solemn eyes grew expressionless, and as pale as boiled onions. Theo thought that they never were so frigid and hideous as when Wendell was discussed.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

## HEART BRUISES.

Wendell, in gay spirits, took an affectionate farewell of his family, "to be absent for a week," he said, "and revel in the delights of a wild duck hunt." But before his return sorrow found its way into his home. One after another the children were stricken with scarlet fever. Telegraphic dispatches were sent in rapid succession, but they failed to reach him.

After a careful diagnosis of Lillian's case the doctor became grave and silent; he gave no hope of her recovery. Theo displayed wonderful strength of character in that ill-starred hour; her self-control was exemplary, and except by her deathly pallor, and a shudder of her delicate form she gave no sign of grief, but unceasingly watched over the frail life which was ebbing away.

At that particular time nurses were greatly in demand, and Miss Flintof came to Theo to offer her services, and stand beside the young mother in her difficulty. The spinster's reputation as a nurse was widespread, for she was a familiar figure in homes of distress; her very name was a relief to anxious mothers, who battled with diseases peculiar to children.



The night of Lillian's death was dark and cold; a heavy rain poured at intervals, and the winter wind howled around the house. Profound silence reigned within the room where Theo heroically strove to revive the fast failing strength of her little daughter. Softly Miss Flintof stole into the apartment. She marveled at the sublime faith and resignation of the patient mother, who bent over her child in its last moments, as though reaching into the mysteries of spirit land, to bear the little one safely into heavenly confines.

The child's delicate lips took on a pallid hue, her dark eyes opened pathetically for the last time. Then followed that dread silence which acknowledged the presence of death.

"Into thy hands, oh Father!" murmured the sorrowing mother, as she kissed the pale forehead, and closed the dimmed eyes.

When Wendell returned home he found the blinds darkened, and white crape on the door. The shock was agonizing, and his grief intense, for Lillian's winsome ways had been the sweetest thing to him in his domestic life. In his sorrow he condemned his own lack of experience in the care of his children, and he felt remorse of conscience. How willingly, he told himself, would he have suffered in their stead! And while reviewing his idle hours of pleasure in the care free past, he made good resolutions for the future. Night and day, during the continued illness, he lingered near with the hope of giving some assistance.

In anxiety and silence Theo nerved herself for what the coming hours might bring. Conflicting



fears almost stifled the voice of hope, but the crisis found her strong. And Miss Flintof's fidelity was unswerving. She wrestled with every discouragement until, at length, the result was success, the danger was almost over.

Wendell saw her gentle treatment of his children with astonishment. He could not reconcile her present conduct with her attitude toward him in the past. "The fault was mine," he concluded; "I was deceived. Oh, what a brute I've been not to have discovered her merit sooner. She is an angel in the disguise of a——" He cleared his throat, and stifled the gruesome thought. "I'll cultivate her friendship; I'll tell her what a wealth of good there is in her."

So he watched for his opportunity, but the spinster ignored even his presence, unless at midnight, when overcome by sleep, he attempted to go from the room; then invariably she called a halt on his footsteps, shook her mummy-like finger in his face with a bullying look of defiance. Night after night Wendell was checkmated by her lanky form and tantalizing manner, for he feared the "hot shot with which her tongue was loaded," as he sometimes expressed it. At last, in desperation, he appealed to the family physician.

"I can endure it no longer," he declared. "That old—I mean Miss Flintof—she loses her own rest in order to watch and torture me into wakefulness. I haven't had an hour's rest since my return home, ten days ago. She is trying to kill me."

The doctor was thoughtful and silent for a



moment. "Her services are indispensable," he said, "and I entreat you not to antagonize her. From her skill and success in nursing one would judge that the purple seal of high scholarship, conferred by the State Medical Examining Board, had been granted her. You are fortunate, sir, in being the recipient of her favors."

"What?" cried Wendell, "she hates me worse than Satan abhors a high priest."

"Be patient, Mr. Wendell," counseled the dignified professional. "A few more days of caution and all will be well." He then walked out, leaving the dismayed young man standing stark still in the hallway.

"A few more days! Why, I'll never live to tell the tale!" groaned Wendell, as visions of Miss Flintof's cruelties arose before him; and "a few more days" rang in his ears till twilight shadows fell.

Theo was greatly relieved by the improvement of her children's condition, and slept throughout the afternoon. Her first thought on waking was of her husband's need of rest, and she appealed to Miss Flintof. "Dear Aunt Charlotte, don't you think that Rupert should retire early to-night? He is completely worn out, the poor darling. I will watch with you."

"As you like," replied Miss Flintof snappishly, "but the moment he leaves, so will I. We will call off the night watch, and let the children take their chances. You, Theo, have lost more rest than any of us. You sacrifice your strength and health prodigally to a false conception of your duty to the wag. Beside, he is no novice at mid-



night watches." And the look with which she regarded Wendell plainly said: "I know more about your nocturnal revels than I care to reveal."

Seeing the danger signal in her eyes, he replied, "If it is my presence that you desire, ma'am, the pleasure is mine." With this shameless perversion of truth he closed his eyes in order to avoid the sight of her dark and vicious countenance.

Theo arranged for his comfort a huge easy chair. She shaded the light from his eyes, covered him with a slumber robe, and left him to rest. These acts of tenderness Miss Flintof regarded with lofty contempt. There was a malicious twinkle in her cold eyes as she brooded over what she termed man's selfishness, and when Wendell gave forth a sound of dreamy satisfaction she could endure it no longer. She turned the light full on his face, and in resolute tones she called, "Theo, the boys need attention. Get the alcohol, while I pour the water."

The kettle on the hearth puffed its white steam; she poured a bowlful, and in passing the chair where Wendell peacefully slumbered, she tipped the bowl slightly, and a tiny billow of the hot water splashed over his feet. Wendell gave a discordant yell, and sprang wildly into the air.

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Flintof stiffly. "Stretched out in this manner, sir, you are in my way. I'll venture to say that if you were out on one of your larks you would not be drowsy."

Wendell was enraged, and felt strongly tempted to pitch his tormenter through the window;



but, like a flash, the doctor's warning recurred to him, so he manfully struggled with his anger.

Theo was beside him in a moment, wild with fright. "Darling, are you hurt?" she questioned fervently. "Aunt Charlotte, how can you be so heartless? I mean, so careless? You have scalded my precious hubby." Like Mary of old, she knelt at her master's feet. Her hair fell in full masses about her slender form, and as she bathed the afflicted parts, her tears fell upon them. No thanks to the spinster's tender mercies, the injuries were slight, but Theo could not be comforted. She hovered near her husband as if she feared further assault.

"Dear Rupert, let me make you an eggnog," she begged, "it will revive you."

"He has been unexpectedly revived," mumbled Miss Flintof, with a satanic grin.

"No," said Wendell quickly, "I have had nothing else but eggs for over a week. I wonder that they don't start me clucking," he blurted out peevishly.

"Pity that they do not start you to setting, and in future cause you to stay at home," interrupted Miss Flintof.

Wendell did not close his eyes again, but kept a strict watch on his enemy. "Fiend incarnate!" he thought, as his sleepy eyes followed her cat-like movements around the room. Sometimes she smiled grimly with satisfaction, for her conception of the situation was equally antagonistic.

At last the trouble was over, but while the children were convalescent Theo's conflicts were many and varied. Indifferent and slothful ser-



vants, an exacting husband and fretful children all tended to weigh heavily upon her spirits. Still, with a grateful heart that her boys were spared, she cheerfully took up the tangled thread of her life.

"Rupert," called Theo from the kitchen one day, "Aunt Charlotte is ill, and has gone away for a change of air. Poor soul, I am distressed about her health."

But at that particular moment Wendell was not in a mood to discuss "Aunt Charlotte." "I hope that she will continue to go, or else take a short cut to perdition," he replied savagely. "Without her evil influence, Theo, I trust that in future you will act a woman's part, and overcome your childish nonsense. When she induced you to keep pace with my movements the trouble began. Through neglect of the nurse there is no telling what happened to the children in your absence."

"I'll never leave them again, hubby," came meekly from the kitchen.

"And we must curtail expenses, for our recent outlay of money has been enormous. In future a girl must supply the place of a woman."

While he fired these light weight messages his wife sat on a low chair beside the cook stove instructing a sluggish black woman how to make piecrust.

"Yes, hubby, I know that your advice is the best. Oh, dear, I fear that I am not a good housewife." Her workbasket, full of stockings to be darned, was near her, and with one foot she rocked the cradle wherein Flintof lay fighting the sleep that almost closed his bright eyes. In



her arms she held Ralph, who fretted and fumed. On her knee leaned Pert, pulling at her face.

"Lord, ma," he screamed, "I'll die if I don't get this pretty red apple!" For, whenever Ralph kept still for a moment, she managed to pare and hand to the cook for safe keeping one more apple for the pies. Meanwhile she paid due attention to her lord's lecture on economy, and tried to tax her own overworked brain with her shortcomings, and her inability to discharge properly the manifold duties of a married woman.

Lillian's curls, which Pert had severed while Theo "kept pace" with Wendell's movements, the mother caressed and wept over daily. "Was I the cause, my angel child?" she often questioned; and when alone she fondly pressed the little one's hair to her lips, amidst gushing tears.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

## CECIL'S PEEP THROUGH CUPID'S GILDED BARS.

Eight years had passed since the parting of Theo and Cecil, when Theo was about to tread the paths of matrimonial seductiveness, veiled in a misty halo of romance. But as that halo faded into the somber skies of life's stern realities, Theo's amiability bore her above the harrowing cares which are strewn along the beaten track of woman's domestic life. Since the death of Lillian the mother's gentle rule over the other children had weakened, until, at times, they were almost beyond control. Wendell declared that they were incorrigible.

"It's your fault, Theo," he would say; "you should enforce obedience from your children. So often have I been mortified at their misconduct that when our guests are here I am in constant fear of an outbreak."

"The children are not bad, Rupert; they are so buoyantly full of spirit that they bubble over," said Theo.

"Banish them to the nursery, and let them bubble there," he suggested.

"By the way, hubby, at noon Cecil Dupree will arrive, you know. She will pay us a little visit during her summer vacation."



"She will be shocked at the state of affairs," he groaned, and again he deplored the insubordination of the children.

While Theo gave respectful attention to her husband's lecture on her inefficiency, Cecil was on her way to the Wendell home. She was at that moment thinking about her married friend, and mentally painting an ideal picture of domestic felicity. When she arrived at her destination and stepped from the car to the platform of the station, she looked eagerly around for Theo, but was met by a negro hackman instead.

"Is dis de lady fo' Miss T'eo Wendell house?" he inquired, as he bowed and flourished his hat.

"Yes; but where is she? I expected her to meet me."

"Oh, she don't g'out much, ma'arm, kase Mars Ruput an' de chil'en keep her right busy," he replied.

A short drive brought Cecil to the home of her hostess, who, flushed and expectant, held out her arms in welcome.

"Too happy to spare time to meet an old friend, Theo?" called Cecil cheerily; and they rushed into each other's arms with all the school girl gush of olden times.

"I am charmed that you have come, Cecil darling!" cried Theo. They caressed each other as they went into the house, and up to the guests' chamber. They were alone for only a moment, while Cecil refreshed herself for dinner. Then the screaming voices of children drew near, with a lively commotion outside. The door was burst open, and the three boys rushed wildly into the



room. They were trying to escape from their nurse, a black girl who previously had been instructed to keep them quiet, and to amuse them until they were called.

"Mamma, mamma," shouted Flintof, "Nancy shut us up in the closet for the 'bad man' to catch us."

The small boys tugged violently at their mother's skirts, and screamed their troubles to the accompaniment of Nancy's mumbled complaints: "I ain't, Miss T'eo; dey tu'n ober all de bread an' 'lasses on de cappet, bruck up de plate, an' try to scratch out my eye, so dat dey can git yer, an' see de new buckra 'ooman."

"Hush, babies!" said the mother caressingly. She lifted Ralph in her arms, while Flintof clung to her skirts as though he would climb to his brother's coveted position.

"Oh, the darlings!" cried Cecil. In her astonishment she could think of nothing else to say. Then she stooped and kissed the juicy lips of the youngsters.

"Gi' me this?" said Pert, as he seized Cecil's watch chain, leaving finger prints on her dainty waist.

Theo washed the children's soiled hands, during which time her guest was constrained to listen to a lengthy oration about their intelligence, their remarkable sayings and traits of character inherited from their father. Cecil gave flattering acquiescence to all that was said, acknowledged their superiority to children in general, and in her heart thanked heaven that no such blessing had been bestowed upon her.



The cook's dismal call, "Dinner is gittin' col' in de pot, an' de fly gwine to tak' de table!" broke into the unfinished recital, and the party trooped down to the dining room, clumsy-footed Nancy bringing up the rear.

Cecil was left with the host, while the hostess flitted rapidly from place to place arranging various dishes on the table, directing the awkward cook, and bribing the children into a temporary lull of their maniacal shrieks of merriment, or deafening shouts of wrath. But Pert's hilarity was at floodtide, and order was impossible. Nancy, with half closed eyes, lolled on a windowsill, dreamily playing on a jewsharp, and taking life easy until Pert threw a fishing line at her head. The hook caught in her woolly plait.

"I've caught an alligator, boys!" he cried; "help me haul it in!"

A wail of anger from Nancy brought her mistress to the rescue. Pert was gently reprimanded and placed near the table. The sight of the tempting viands sharpened his appetite, and soon he was busily engaged in tasting everything within his reach. When all were seated at the dinner table the stolid Nancy served as waitress.

"My dear," said Wendell to his wife, "the soup is a failure; kindly have it removed." Then, with a softened voice and expression, he turned to his guest. "Change your plate, Miss Dupree, and have fish?"

"No, thank you; I am enjoying my soup," replied Cecil. She kept up a pleasant flow of chat, notwithstanding the noise of Flintof's angry voice that whined out complaints.



Wendell was apparently disgusted with everything that was served, and when not smiling approval on Cecil's charms, he kept in operation a line of critical mental telegraphy with his wife, who, in her sad-eyed watch of his disdainful appetite, forgot all else. The soup had been spilled on the snowy tablecloth; for, in removing the plates, Nancy had made a dive with one hand to pull up her stockings. She hurried from the room, but soon returned with a dingy rag to repair damages. Her master's wrathful flush, however, and the look that he gave her suggested lynching, and convinced her that it would be prudent for her to desist.

The next course began favorable, but soon Nancy cried out to Pert, "Aha, I knewed you was gwine to choke! Who you eber see kin swallow a whole tatter bedout chaw it fust? Boy, you's wusser dan a bullfrog!" She tried to poke her finger down his throat, but Pert resented such gross familiarity; he clinched it in his teeth with a vise-like hold. With a surly growl the girl quickly jerked it loose.

In this dire extremity the cook unexpectedly appeared in the doorway, and in deep, sepulchral tones announced, "De dog tu'n ober de ham b'iler, tak de ham wo bin a coolin', drag 'em down de steps—gone wid 'em!"

All eyes were turned on Pert, who was blue in the face; but no one seemed surprised excepting the visitor, who was in agony with suppressed merriment.

Theo arose quickly, and with a low murmured "Excuse me, please," left the table. She took



the young gourmand from the room, and when in the hallway, carried him through vigorous acrobatic exercises until the offending potato fell with a thud to the floor.

When dinner was over Theo hurriedly superintended affairs in the rear of the house, while her husband escorted Cecil to the veranda, "to show her the flowers," he said. He was charmed with the pretty woman, and only his wife's inability to avoid domestic mishaps threw a damper over his gay spirits.

"I shall esteem it a delightful privilege, Miss Dupree," he said, "if you will let me help make your visit with us agreeable; otherwise, I am afraid you will find it beastly dull. My wife is so completely engrossed with the children and household affairs, that she sometimes neglects me. I'm often jealous, for you know it's man's nature to crave a goodly share of woman's devotion." He gazed earnestly into Cecil's merry eyes. "Will you drive with me this afternoon?" he asked.

"Thank you, Mr. Wendell, I shall be pleased to go, and I am sure that your wife will bear us company."

"Yes, indeed," rejoined Wendell; "I should be happy to have her with us. I shall go now and try to induce her to join us. Au revoir." He lighted his cigar, passed through the hall, and halted at the pantry door, where Theo was placing away pastry which she had made in the forenoon.

"Theo," he spoke in a subdued tone; "I have left the account book on my desk; look it over



and see if there is not a mistake in the charges. The grocer's bill is enormous, and there are others equally so. It seems that there is no end to this exorbitant outlay of money." He gave a doleful sigh. Theo flushed as if accused of theft, and with slavish humility replied:

"Nothing has been bought this month, hubby, but what is absolutely necessary. In order to economize I have done the entire sewing for the family."

"Well, there is evidently mismanagement. The cook's report of the ham, for instance. You don't watch the servants as you should."

"Oh, dear!" she sighed.

"Yes, extremely dear for me. By the way, dinner was a failure throughout, and the children's behavior was vile. I was mortified at the whole proceeding."

An awkward pause ensued, and again he spoke. "Why aren't you as jolly as your friend, Miss Dupree? Positively, your face is as doleful as a dull sermon on morality. Shake off depression, and put on some style, old girl." A smile overspread his face, and he added softly, "Your friend is charming."

Theo forced a smile, and then suggested that he should send for Mary, their former cook. "This field hand you sent here," she said, "will drive me mad. She has never before used a cook stove. She persists in walking around at night with a light wood torch. She uses my best dinner napkins for dish cloths. In short, she requires incessant watching."



"Mary charges too much, and besides she feeds her family from the kitchen, and you know it."

"Well, get a competent girl that can help me with the children. I have no time for recreation. My head aches often, and I am worn out. Nancy is worthless in every respect."

Wendell heard a childish whimper, and cut short his lecture. "Oh, nonsense, Theo, control your servants and children. I have my business to occupy my time." Satisfied with having had the last word, he walked away, and then called from the doorway, "Senator Whitmark will take supper with us to-night."



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## A DIMINUTIVE RACE RIOT.

Theo pulled herself together, and remembered her guest. "Cecil," she called, "come with me, dear. I must see to the children's bath; and while I am busy you may rest in my room, and be with me."

"You seem to be always busy, Theo. Is your husband aware of the value of his jewel? A beautiful type of wife and mother, but withal quite too unselfish." Cecil followed Theo to the bedroom, and with graceful indolence reclined on a couch, while Theo, with Ralph on her lap, sat in the doorway that led into the bathroom.

"Wrong beginning you made, dear," said Cecil, as she gravely shook her head; "preserve your beauty and health, or they will forsake you, and you know the natural sequence; you cannot retain the admiration of your husband."

"Ah, Cecil, a man should cherish his wife far more after she has broken and aged in his service—especially if she bears him children."

"Should!" repeated Cecil; "but how many do? It compromises a woman's dignity for her to make a slave of herself."

"Hush, children, don't make so much noise!"



cried Theo, interrupting her friend's speech. She took hold of Pert, who was throwing a ball in a reckless manner, gave Flintof a caressing little tap in order to quiet his shrieks, then smilingly resumed the subject. "You were ever an enemy to love and conjugal happiness. For shame, you naughty girl."

"Shame it will be when I make concession to man," laughed Cecil. "Since the garden of Eden incident the shame has been on woman for her cringing servility to man." But her voice was lost in the disturbance caused by a scuffle between Pert and the nurse. There was a sounding "slap, slap," followed by a succession of yells, and from Theo an apologetic, "You unruly boy! It pains me to punish you."

With a rippling laugh Cecil inquired, "Theo, do you have this hubbub often, or is it special for my amusement?"

"It's dis way ebery day, ma'arm, an' wuss," spoke Nancy.

The mother struggled to rescue Flintof from Pert's cruelties, while the nurse stood idly regarding them. "Nancy," cried Theo in exasperation, "can you find nothing to do? I'll report your indolence to your father."

"I ain't neber had none," replied Nancy serenely, "kase one day I ax ma 'bout him, an' she say she dunno rightly who 'e is." Then she turned and spoke coaxingly to Ralph: "Come, le' me wipe off your face wid de washrag, an' den your ma might scuse you from washin' all ober in de big tub. 'Member de frog wa bin a settin' on de tussock in de mill pon'? He see de big



rain a comin', so he jump down in de pon', den w'en de rain stop comin' 'e poke 'e head out de water an' laugh. 'Aha,' 'e say, 'ef I didn' be so sha'p jist now, I sho woulder git mysel' all wet up.'"

"Is that so?" asked Pert, who had paused in his juvenile performance to listen. "That frog is your brother, Nancy, or else he wouldn't be such a big fool."

"Look yer, boy, I gots no frog in my fambly; neider fool," spoke Nancy, as she bristled with anger. But the children were again in an uproar, and Nancy subsided in sullen silence.

"Theo, come, lie down and rest," called Cecil, over the disturbance. "Let the nurse attend the children, I implore you."

"I cannot just now, dear—impossible; for with all my haste somehow the day passes so quickly that night finds my duties unfinished. Stop that, Pert! You Flintof!" But the boys heeded her not, as hurriedly she laid out the little garments. Then, in a despairing voice, she bade Nancy go down in the yard and bring her a switch. With a vicious nod at Pert, Nancy moved rather briskly, for she bore him no good will, and was never seen to smile except when he came to grief. Soon she returned, bearing a barrel hoop in her hand.

"Take it away," commanded her mistress sternly.

"Gi' me it for a play horse," cried Pert, as he seated himself astride of it, and galloped wildly around the room.

A ring at the doorbell interrupted Theo's re-



proof. "Go quickly, Nancy," said Mrs. Wendell; "and if visitors are there tell them that I am not at home. Mind, do not invite them in."

"Yes'm, yes'm," replied the nurse; and ill at ease in her "crying" shoes, she clogged heavily down the steps.

Theo felt strange misgivings regarding the negro's training in such matters, so she hurried out and leaned over the balustrade just in time to hear the girl announce: "Miss T'eo say she done gone out, an' unner can't come in de house."

"Who? What?" asked a sweet-voiced woman in surprise.

"Miss T'eo wa dar up in de loft say I mus' tell you she done gone out, an' unner can't come in no how."

As if to corroborate the statement, Flintof gave an alarming yell: "Mamma, mamma, come here quick. Pert's got my pretty shoes for boats in the bathtub."

When the door closed, and the visitors had departed, Theo gave vent to her grievous agitation.

"Was ever circumstance so trying? Nancy, how could you insult my friends in this manner?" she almost sobbed.

"Ain't you tol' me to tol' dem you had went out?" questioned Nancy, while her expression of innocence plainly showed that she was ignorant of having sinned.

Another boisterous shout for help brought the downcast mother to a sense of her duty in the bathroom, for Pert had not only put his little



brother's shoes into the bathtub, but also everything else within his reach, including the twins; and he had begun an impartial torture of first Flintof and then Ralph. He seemed possessed with a spirit of Cain.

As the mother rushed into the room, she cried aloud, "You Pert, don't you dare to put that soap in Flintof's mouth!" But soon another wail of agony was heard.

"Pert done rub soap in 'e breder eye," explained Nancy.

"You never told me not to rub it in his eyes, my dear little ma; you said not to put it in his mouth," said the transgressor boldly. A sounding slap brought him to order, but only for a moment.

"Now, you scamp, let the nurse bathe you," commanded Theo. She soothed Flintof's sobbing cries, while the nurse made a slow advance on Pert. As two fighters measure each other before clinching in deadly combat, the two began warfare. Nancy succeeded in getting a hold on Pert.

"Turn me loose!" he commanded, as he boxed at her wildly. She dodged every blow with the skill of a pugilist. "Don't you touch me, you black woolly nigger; I want my mamma to bathe me," said Pert, as he sprang from her and got under the bed. Sweet silence fell like a holy calm for a full minute.

"Theo, my dear," spoke Cecil, "how can you look so solemn? Excuse me for laughing, but the whole affair is too ridiculous."

"Nancy is a newcomer, and the children are



not accustomed to her ways," replied Theo. She felt pity for the forlorn looking creature.

"Pray that they never will be," laughed Cecil.

A thump, bump and tussle over the floor proclaimed that the battle was on, for Nancy was dragging Pert to the bathroom.

"Yes, Cecil, I'll hear you in a minute," said Theo absently, as she held Flintof in one arm and tried by gentle persuasion and a timid tap of the hair brush to separate the infuriated Pert and weeping Nancy; but he held his grip.

"I'll kill her, ding if I don't!" he cried, flushed and delighted at his conquest, while his defeated opponent blubbered and mopped tears with her sleeve.

"I's a gwine—to—quit—'fo—my — munt—up!" she growled. "Da' boy cuss me, an' tear all de yerrings out o' my yers."

"Don't you dare to say that Pert cursed you, Nancy," counseled her mistress, growing red in the face.

"He is cuss me!" retorted Nancy impertinently; "'e cuss me ding, an' 'nigger'!" she snivelled and snarled, while Pert showered kisses on his mother's face.

"Forgive me, my precious little mamsy!" he said. "I'm sorry if I grieved you, but you know a boy mustn't let a coon get the best of him. When I get to be a man I'm going to lynch them all, and I'm going to live in Georgia."

When the struggle with Pert was over he was placed in a chair for punishment, while Ralph was bathed. Nancy stood by in indolent ease,



and caressed her ears until the work was finished.

Presently the same gruff voice that had at dinner deplored the loss of the ham, called out in agitation. "Please, misses, come down to de kitchen!"

"I can't leave just now; what is the trouble, Polly?"

"Nuttin—only you gi' me too much salt fo' de ice cream. I tase it to see if it was gittin' col', an' it fair scal' up my mouf."

"Didn't you mix the salt in with the ice, as I instructed you to do?"

"No, ma'arm, I trow it in de custard."

"Oh, merciful heaven!" cried her mistress, as she arose. Then she wiped the perspiration from her heated face, and vanished after the cook.

Celia's merriment gave place to profound pity, so she went earnestly to work, finished dressing the youngsters, and sent them with their nurse for an outing.

"Well done," cried Theo, on her return to the room. "Cecil, you are entitled to the highest praise. You managed splendidly, or else you have charmed my babies. But get ready for your drive, dear; Rupert is waiting for you."

"Since you will not accompany us, promise that you will rest while the children are absent," said Cecil, as she daintily threw a kiss from her fingers to the weary looking hostess.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

## IN THE KINGDOM OF POTS AND PANS.

But there was no rest for Theo. The remembrance of repeated failures in the culinary conflicts weighed heavily upon her spirits; so she determined to persevere in training servants until she found one capable of learning. Polly was past the meridian of life, and set in her ways. Nancy moved by instinct, and seemed proof against instruction. Therefore the dainty woman found herself queen regent in the kingdom of pots and pans.

Not until the lights were on, and laughing voices were heard on the balcony did Theo remember her own heated and neglected appearance. Then she ran upstairs, and hurriedly changed the faded wrapper she wore for her best gown; not one fashioned by a modiste as were Cecil's handsome costumes, but one that her own hands had created when the days' toils were ended, and the household slept.

At supper Wendell looked with impatience at the flushed face and roughened hands of his wife and then at the dainty complexion and delicate hands of Miss Dupree. The contrast was pronounced. "A fellow would be proud to call Miss Dupree wife," he reflected, "for she would pre-



side with grace and beauty in his home. By all the gods, a man's love must be stimulated, or it will stagnate."

The worldly wise senator felt abundantly in the recesses of his humane heart that masculine pity known among men for the deterioration of each other's wives. "Ah," he commented mentally. "Wendell is a disappointed man. His goddess proves to be of common mould—another of those creatures who, after marriage, lay aside their feminine charms. Smiles have changed to constrained looks, and eyes once lovelit have grown restless and sad. Pity—pity!"

Since Theo had lost her identity by merging her very life into that of her husband, she did not appeal to men, excepting to awaken their pity or their protective instincts. Her reticent manner, her modesty and purity could not stir their enthusiasm. A woman—oh, so much a woman; but she had none of the wiles of her sex—none of its designing instincts.

After supper the young wife was detained for some time upstairs, putting the children to bed. But when that was finished she tripped cheerfully into the presence of her guests. Reaction speedily followed, and despite effort and will power, her attempts to be entertaining were unspontaneous and forced. She tried the rendition of a song, but her voice was husky and utterly devoid of melody. Gladly she resigned her place at the piano to Cecil, who brilliantly gave one musical gem after another, both vocal and instrumental.

When the evening was over, and Wendell was



alone with his wife, he painted for her a word picture of her own defection.

"I know that I failed in my song to-night, Rupert," replied Theo submissively, "but I was so tired." Her voice failed her, and she fell to sobbing in subdued measures. In her struggle to be a model housewife, cook and nurse combined she had never before reckoned the cost.

"Don't cry, please," said Wendell coldly, as he crawled into bed; "I have enough to endure. Sometimes I am forced to believe that marriage is a vile delusion, love a myth, and——"

A passionate burst of sobs from the wretched little woman checked his heartless speech, and caused him to cover his ears; while she, at last finding spare time, indulged in the inexpensive luxury of tears—idle tears. Sad that they are inexpensive; for if every tear that a husband wrings from his wife's heart cost his pocket a dollar she would have an easier time.

"Drive with your husband this afternoon, Theo," said Cecil coaxingly; "positively, you are pining for the fresh air. Go, dearie. I will care for the youngsters."

"Rupert has so many demands upon his time, Cecil, that I seldom accompany him; for when his day's work is done he must have recreation; so I give him up to 'the boys,'" replied Theo in an apologetic tone. "He prefers having me, I well know, but——"

"Ma, look a' pa!" shouted Pert from the veranda.

Theo had fancied that her husband was busy



in his office at that early hour, and in surprise she rushed to the door in time to see his buggy, as it turned a distant corner. Waving plumes and lilac shirtwaist convinced her that a woman sat beside him. With a keen pang of pain she strained her eyes to see if it were Madame Frugatzka.

"Who is with your father?" she asked of Pert, while she hoped against hope that her eyes had deceived her.

"Oh, that same mash that drives with him all the time," said Pert. "She stays at the Windsor." Then in an undertone, "Golly, mamma, she's a good looker!"

"Pert, child, come here. When did you ever before see that woman with your father? Isn't this the first time?" She caught her breath, as if her eternal doom hung upon his reply.

"No, I've seen them before just a driving and driving, and papa will not take me in the buggy."

Theo groaned audibly. She forgot that Pert's veracity many times might be impeached by a vivid imagination.

"What is the matter?" inquired the innocent mischief maker. "Are you sick, my lovely mamma?"

"No, child," in a despairing voice.

The next morning at breakfast Theo was pensive and pale, and a glance at her husband would cause her eyes to fill with tears. Cecil tactfully played the agreeable, and wondered if every day of her stay at this home would be marked by varied and startling incidents. Wendell kissed his wife before he went away that morning, and



soon she was soaring to sublime heights on her favorite subject—love. To discuss this passion was to her a harbinger of coming joy. To dream over it illuminated the air-castles which her fancy painted, and past memories gave future hope.

Later Cecil found her carefully dusting and folding away the dress suit that Wendell had hastily thrown on a chair after midnight, when he stole noiselessly into the room. Theo took the faded flower from his coat, and placed it in her bosom. It was withered and crushed, but he had worn it.

"Too early in the day for romantic love dreams, Theo," laughed Cecil. "Wait for the hour of twilight, and do not lavish caresses on the clothes. Take the substance, not the shadow."

"Ah," sighed Theo, as she nestled her face down to the empty sleeve, "even this is dear to me."

Cecil made a grimace. "I tell you, woman, your sentiment shows a defect in the nature of your sex—a failure to satisfy some higher law of life," she said.

"I cannot believe, Cecil, that you are as heartless as your words imply." Theo raised her eyes heavenward, and the words dropped like honey from her lips: "Love is the very elixir of life, and will endure throughout all eternity, especially the kind——"

"Wa you gwine to git fo' dinner?" interrupted the cook from the doorway; "de butcher man done gone by, an' dar ain't nuttin' in de



house like fresh meat. De one rooster wa lef ober f'um yistiddy wa poor as a Job, an' de cat done chaw off de hin' part, anyhow."

"That is enough, Polly," said her mistress in commanding tones. "I will hear the rest when I come down to the kitchen. Go and see that Nancy takes care of the children."

Then Theo proceeded to wipe her husband's patent leather pumps with a silk handkerchief, as she resumed her favorite subject.

"I was telling you, Cecil, of the strength of his lo——" Again the cook's discordant tones broke the spell.

"Please, misses, don't wait too long fo' you come, kase de house wash way. I tried to git some water out o' de side o' de wall, same like I see you do, an'—bless God!—de water buss out, an' it won't stop run fo' me. I stuff a rag in de water sprout, an' it spit dat out, an' run all ober de kitchen. I put de bucket dar, an' it just bile ober dat, so I lef' em, kase I don't wanna git my feets wet. I's plagued might'ly wid de miasthma in my t'roat."

At the first hint of the calamity Theo bounded past the deliberate creature, and down the stairway. After long and patient toil she once more joined Cecil for a chat. Flushed and heated, she took up her workbasket.

"While I am waiting on Polly's movements," she said, "I will put a few stitches in Ralph's little suit. Oh, dear, there is Flintof's untouched. And so many underclothes to be made!"

"Employ a seamstress," suggested Cecil; "you are trying to do the work of three women."



"It is expensive to have sewing done for so many, and beside, it is really a pleasure in my leisure moments. At night, while waiting for hubby to come home, happy thoughts are woven into every stitch. As I fashion the little garments for our babies, adown the years I can see them developed into splendid men, cheering my husband's and my old age."

"Unless there is a wonderful reformation in the existing state of affairs you will never have an 'old age,'" laughed Cecil.

"But, while I live," said Theo, "give me love; it makes heaven of earth, it lightens every burden, it brings peace and gladness into the hardest day; it alters even the tone of a voice. The greatest thing in our world, and the incipient expression of that nobler, grander, eternal love beyond—for heaven is love."

Loud altercation outside interrupted further speech. Theo threw aside her sewing, and hurried into the hallway. The children were tugging and warring over a basket of broken eggshells and dead chickens.

"Me pull this chickie out of the egg," cried Ralph in great distress, "and the little foot came off."

"Where did you get them?" asked Theo in amazement.

"Ralph and Flint took them out of Aunt Charlotte's yard," explained Pert.

"We never!" cried the accused, in the same breath.

"Pert tore off boards from the fence, and then crawled under and got them," said Flintof.



"You story!" declared Pert vehemently.

The mother held up her hands in horror. "Aunt Charlotte will never forgive us. What shall I do?" She turned to Cecil, who was viewing the affair from a humorous standpoint, and questioned: "How can you laugh at anything so distressing?"

"Let me run over and sooth the infuriated Miss Flintof," suggested Cecil cheerfully. "I will endeavor to show her where the whole affair is more a subject for laughter than for groans and anger." And away she went, happy, light-hearted Cecil.

Theo turned to the leader and instigator of the mischief. "Get into that chair, Pert," she commanded, as she led him to the corner. "Turn your face to the wall until your father comes home. He shall punish you severely."

"What is I done, ma?" inquired the innocent looking chap, as he wriggled himself into the chair. "Make Flint sit down, too; he broke more eggs than I did."

"I never!" contradicted Flintof. "The poor little chicks were shut up in the eggs, an' me an' Ralph only helped them out. Pert is a thief, eh, mamma? because he stole Aunt Charlotte's eggs."

This was too much for proud-spirited Pert. He forgot that he was in custody, leaped from his chair, and had a royal skirmish with the insulting boy. "Take it back!" he shouted, pounding Flintof, while his mother pounded away on him.

There was a general hubbub before order was



restored, and then, in a melancholy state of mind, Theo called the nurse to account for the misdemeanor.

"I draped to sleep on the doo-step," spoke Nancy, after a yawn, "an' de chil'en git 'way from me."

"How dare you sleep when my children are in your care, Nancy?"

"I had to went to de settin' up las' night—my great-gran'ma dead, an' my head hot me."

"Well, don't you ever dare to frolic all night again while you are in my employment!" commanded her unsympathetic mistress, in a voice of anger.

With a sullen look Nancy mumbled some vague excuse: "Fambly dead, an' my gran'ma lef' mud'less!" She then pulled at her stocking and in a languid manner walked out with the debris of Miss Flintof's poultry yard. From the doorway she rolled her eyes and questioned, "Mus' I car' 'em back?"

"Do what?" questioned her mistress, on the verge of tears.

"I ax you if I mus' tote 'em back to de ol' 'ooman, Miss Flint'; kase de basket b'longs to she."

"Leave my presence!" said the distracted little woman, with a deprecating gesture; and then she betook herself to the kitchen, where equally trying circumstances awaited her.

After witnessing two weeks of this—Theo's daily routine—Cecil's tender heart could endure it no longer; so she returned to the peaceful shades of Campville. "No lovesick nonsense,"



she told herself, "shall ever change my contentment into anxiety. I will preserve my identity, and develop the potential power within me, which the Almighty intends every woman should use, except those masses of flesh and blood, with sentimental yearnings and clinging tendencies. These He has created for human incubators, to people the world."



## CHAPTER XXX.

## A FIERY TRIAL.

An annual celebration of the "R. G.'s" proved an eventful, almost tragic occasion in Wendell's career. The affair was brilliant, the decorations were works of art, and the banquet was a fit offering for monarchs.

The evening was balmy, and a summer moon shed a mellow radiance over land and sea. Theo's pride in her husband strongly tempted her to mingle in the festivities, and be near him; but sad memories soon banished the desire. The carriages rolled by, and she heard the gay voices of the devotees of pleasure, as they hurried onward. She stood on the balcony, and with profound admiration watched her husband's matchless form, as he walked away from his home for more enlivening scenes. The moon's rays rested on her peaceful face as she happily dreamed over the hurried caress he had given her at parting; and she was so completely lost in sentimental revery that she was startled by the sudden appearance of Miss Flintof, who, like a grim sentinel, stood beside her.

"Poor Cinderella!" cried the spinster, "poor simple creature!" Bitter sarcasm blended with pity in her voice. "I knew that you would be



left at home, so I've come to sit with you. Are the noisy children in bed?"

"I am glad to see you, Aunt Charlotte. Yes, the little ones are asleep, and the nurse is watching over them. I came down with Rupert. Oh, you should have seen him! He is superbly handsome in his new uniform—a perfect king!"

"I waited until he was gone on purpose to avoid the sight," rejoined Miss Flintof, with asperity. "King! Humph! King of asses! Frivolous scamp, he would better be upstairs with his unruly children, or here with his neglected wife."

Theo had long since become accustomed to these blunt and scathing speeches, so with her usual amiability, she smiled and continued: "I should like to go around to the armory for a moment, and through the low windows of the dance hall see the festivities. Go with me, will you?" In a pretty and winsome way she caressed the frozen woman.

"Oh, nonsense," began Miss Flintof.

"Oh, please!" entreated Theo. "I want one more glimpse at hubby. My eyes just ache to see him there, a prince among men."

"Better sights to be seen elsewhere," advised the spinster. "To go for a quiet walk would give you more satisfaction than slipping up on that cur when he is turned loose among women. I'll wager that at this minute he has forgotten that he has a family at home. You'd better not hunt for trouble, girl."

A look of fear crept into the sweet blue eyes, for the hint was maddening.

"No, indeed, Aunt Charlotte; it is not to spy



on my husband's actions that I go, but to feast my eyes."

"For heaven's sake hush, and I will go anywhere you say," snapped Miss Flintof.

"Very good," laughed Theo, "I'll get my wrap, and we'll go to the ball." She ran quickly up the stairs, cautioned the nurse about the children, and hastily threw a lace scarf over her fair hair. In high spirits she tripped along beside her rigid chaperon, and together they entered an open gateway that led to the extreme end of the hall. Through the rear window their view was perfect. In this recessed part of the building mammoth palms formed a canopy overhead, and the spot was secluded and inviting. In almost hidden nooks were nestled cosy tête-à-têtes; and here the music of a dreamy waltz mingled with the splash of an unseen fountain, lulling the senses to a pleasurable passiveness not conducive to prudence. Inspired by the first exhilarating effects of champagne, light-hearted courtiers whispered soft flatteries into the willing ears of impressionable women, who, forgetting all else, gave themselves unreservedly to the joys of the evening.

Theo stood in smiling eagerness outside of the window, and strained her eyes to catch a glimpse of her beloved. "Oh, to be there with hubby!" sighed Theo. "Old memories would awaken, and we would hear again the chime of wedding bells."

Soon the young wife with a startled movement stepped back into the shadow of the trees. She saw her husband, to the rhythm of the music



guiding his partner from among the dancers. Gracefully, and as if by accident, they waltzed into the recess, where they were hidden from the view of the ballroom. Slowly they glided among the scattered palms. Theo saw in her husband's arms the willowy form of Marcella Frugatza. He held the woman close to his breast, as he gazed into her dusky, bewitching eyes. He whispered to her, while she smilingly and deliberately held her ripe lips alarmingly near to his silky mustache. She was dangerously fascinating, and her starry eyes lured him on. So it seemed to his anxious wife, whose heart gave an awful bound, while her look of joyous anticipation turned to one of horrible fear. Jealousy fastened its iron fetters upon Theo; her trusting heart was flooded with dark suspicion, her stainless soul was poisoned with its deadly venom.

Wendell bent his head, and lightly kissed the bare and shapely neck so near his lips. Madam Frugatza's face flushed crimson. "With passion for my husband!" was Theo's smothered exclamation, as the heartless Miss Flintof sidled up to her and whispered: "Have you got enough, Theo?" But the question fell on deaf ears. A mighty pain stifled Theo's speech, as spellbound she watched the guilty pair clinging together in what to her seemed an interminable caress. She saw her heart's idol, in whom her confidence had been supreme, nestle his handsome face down to that of her rival, as they paused under a giant palm. Then with the daring grace which distinguished Wendell, his lips met those of the



Frugatza, and, like a king bee, he sipped the honey from them.

He was only a man, strongly tempted, and did not regard his action as a criminal offense. That woman was created for man's pleasure he religiously believed. Furthermore, a man dislikes to appear "slow" in the eyes of the woman who induces him.

For Theo the ordeal was fiery. She forgot the presence of Miss Flintof, and wildly fled the scene.

Standing up against a tall tree, Miss Flintof was so paralyzed with indignation that she seemed a part of the ridged trunk. Her rugged features were set, and her cat-like eyes gleamed with a thirst for vengeance upon the disloyal man. To bring him before the world as an example of modern husbands, to reveal his profligate character, and to point the finger of scorn at him was her burning desire. "The crisis is at hand!" she said to the evil spirit within her.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

## WAS LOVE VANQUISHED?

Cecil sat alone in her pleasant apartment, the dainty tea table spread before her. She wore a simple and becoming gown of delicate pink. Her fluffy hair was thrown back from her brow; her eyes were thoughtful and earnest, and a soft flush was on her rounded cheeks. When alone in her little haven of rest, with her books, flowers, birds and music her manner was caressingly tender.

The afternoon was well advanced. The warm rays of the August sunset glinted through the lofty pines and aspens, which cast their lengthening shadows over the peaceful landscape, while their low, tremulous whispering mingled with other sweet sounds of nature.

Cecil's thoughts were disturbed by a noisy shake of the doorknob, and suddenly the red head and astonished face of Betty Robbins, the landlady, were thrust into the doorway. In a joyful voice she exclaimed, "A man! Thar's a man for you, Miss Cecil, an' a pow'ful good looking one he is, to be sho'!"

Cecil doubted the lady's judgment in such matters, and fully expected to see a book agent, or a piano tuner. "Send him around to the front



door," she said, as leisurely she arose from the table, crossed the room and opened the door. She drew a quick breath, and a deathly pallor overspread her face, as she caught at a chair for support. Near the threshold stood Douglas Barrymore in the flesh, as handsome as a Greek god.

"Alive!" cried Cecil rapturously, all the color surging back over her brow, cheeks and neck, as she extended both hands. But quickly her proud dignity came to the rescue. She gave him a cordial welcome, and soon they were chatting in the old familiar way. Barrymore accepted her hospitality graciously, and partook of the luscious fruit, shortcake and tea which were temptingly served by Cecil's fair hands. There is nothing so vivifying as hope, and her frank manifestation of delight filled him with animated happiness.

"What a gem of a home nest you have here, Miss Dupree!" he said. "I did not expect to find anything so charming in these wilds. This room seems to be the abode of all that is loveliest in nature."

"Oh, thanks. But tell me of the Alpine accident, and how you escaped, or I shall believe myself in the presence of a glacial ghost." Cecil laughed, while a pink wave swept over her animated face. Barrymore gave a brief account of his experience in the disaster.

"When the ice bridge—just at the turn of a cliff—gave way," he said, "two of us were cut off from the party; and at that time we didn't know how many perished in the fall, for in the



howling wind and blinding snow our voices were unheard. Without a guide we could not proceed a step. My companion in distress became demoralized by the horror of the situation, and I had to force him to make an effort for his life. Providence smiled upon us, however, for soon the storm ceased, and before midnight we were overtaken by an ascending party, which we, of course, joined, for we had no guide to pilot us back to Chamouni. I was very miserable, for I feared that Reed was among those who went with the ice bridge."

"I presume that you had no thought of your anxious friends in Chamouni?" said Cecil with averted eyes.

There was a moment's silence, and then she found Barrymore beside her. They stood near an open window, which was screened by flowers.

"Well?" she questioned.

"Shall I proceed with my story?"

"If you like, sir."

"Four days later, when we reached Chamouni, there was no trace of my anxious friends, though I was rejoiced to learn of Reed's safety, and wired him immediately. But just then, Miss Dupree, I did not think that you cared to know of my whereabouts."

"How unkind," interrupted Cecil.

"So I concluded to let the matter stand, and to drop out of your life," he continued; "but oh, my Alpine flower, it has been like resisting an electrical current. So I have given way to its mighty power. It is madness to fight against



the decrees of Fate, and have to go under at last." Strong emotion almost unmanned him, and Cecil also became agitated.

"Five years have dragged by with leaden skies and dreary days while my heart hungered for you, Eidelweiss. You have made a vacuum there which you alone can fill. Resist love's pleading no longer, light of my life."

The last rays of the setting sun caressed the tendrils of the white and purple heliotrope that festooned the windows, while the soft wind wafted their delicate perfume into the room. Cecil's face went pale. Her lips trembled, and then a sparkle came into her eyes and color to her cheeks as she turned a glorified look of happiness full upon Barrymore. The young man came close to her, and bent over her.

"I thank heaven that you live," said Cecil, and her voice trembled with intensity. "It gives me joy to know that you escaped that awful doom." Then her words sank to a whispered sigh. "I—love—you, Douglas, but love is all that ever can exist between us; any closer alliance would rob us of its wonderful charm, its idealism. Kiss my forehead, Douglas, and leave me forever."

Then strong, independent Cecil gradually yielded herself to her lover's magnetic caresses. Though her words caused his hopes and heart to sink to an abyss of despair, he had never lived until that moment. He folded her closely in his arms, kissed her brow, her cheeks, her lips. Cecil, with a sob of rapture, sank upon his breast, forgetting that "lovers and idiots were synonymous words." In love's delirium an hour winged



its rapid flight. And when the gloaming had waned into night's darker shades and Cecil was alone she paced the floor, in her blissful reverie almost treading on air. Presently she lit a lamp, and surveyed herself before the mirror. There she saw that her pompadour, in love's gymnastics, had suffered a disorderly tumble. She felt for her combs—they were missing. Then her hands strayed to the back of her belt. Her skirt had slipped away and hung one-sided. Her own reflection plainly said to her, "What a fool you have made of yourself!" and brought her back to things of earth. She condemned her weakness, deplored her folly, then rallied her failing strength of purpose, and it stormed in upon her and gained the mastery.

The next day she wrote a spunky and forceful letter to Barrymore, in which "never again" was the theme. His reply was prompt, clever and concise:

"'Never again,'" he wrote, "shall weakness bar Douglas Barrymore from long lost and fairly won happiness; for when you, with your feeble pen, tried to lock me outside, the gates of Paradise had already enclosed me within their elysian fields, where hand in hand with my Alpine flower I will dwell forever more."



## CHAPTER XXXII.

## THE CRISIS.

As the pleasures of the evening grew more hearty, Wendell divided his attentions impartially between wall flower and belle. He was conscious of no infidelity to his wife, whom, if he thought of her at all, he believed to be at home, contented with her children.

In the meantime Theo was completely beside herself with jealousy, and planned self-destruction as the only panacea for the tumultuous throbbing of her wretched heart. The moonlight seemed turned to blood, and the stars a meteoric shower around her; and in her frenzy she fled away from the scene of her undoing—she knew not whither. But unconsciously she bent her footsteps toward the river, where, she sentimentally told herself, the faithless Rupert would find her dead body floating in the morning. “But what of my rival?” she asked her angry heart. “Will he marry her, and will she have the control of my children?” Involuntarily her feet slackened their pace, and she experienced a violent revulsion of feeling.

Four hours had elapsed since the beginning of the evening’s festivities. The last waltz was beginning. Wendell once more sought Madam



Frugatza, and again the two drifted toward the picturesque recess. He remembered his reckless indiscretion of the earlier part of the evening, and felt strong in his cooler judgment. She was flushed with her triumphs, for she had made many conquests. But, delighted to be with Wendell, she implored his protection from the attentions of others.

"Young Heathcote is wild with jealousy because I favor you, Rupert," she whispered; "I think he is watching me now."

But the warning was treated lightly, although Wendell saw a man's form skulking around the window. The dance continued.

Suddenly a figure, tall and slender, with a slouch hat and mask, entered the doorway. Something flashed forth in his hand. A shriek rang through the hall; the music ceased, and a panic ensued. The assailant had sprung for Madam Frugatza's throat, but Wendell's fist dealt him a stunning blow, which sent him reeling and staggering backward down the steps.

Madam was more vexed than injured. She stood aghast, and livid with rage. Her revengeful Italian blood seemed bubbling in her veins. She cared nothing for the wound, although the subtle weapon had made an ugly scratch, and blood trickled from her neck over her handsome bodice. Wendell tried to staunch the flow with his silken handkerchief, but she disdainfully tossed it away. A physician attempted to examine the wound, but she scoffed at his services.

"Is the American too cowardly to protect a woman from murder?" she cried. "Capture the



would-be assassin! Bring me the heart's blood of the fiend who has dared this ignoble act!" she spoke in fierce tones to Wendell, while her magnificent eyes flashed blue lights. In her fury she towered above those around her. "Go quickly, before he escapes!" she commanded.

"Think first of your own welfare, I entreat you!" said Wendell in great excitement. "Have the wound attended to at once."

But the enraged woman jostled him aside, seized a stiletto that she wore concealed in her bosom, burst headlong through the crowd, and sprang through the doorway. Wendell was after her in an instant, but she had found the prostrate form of her enemy. Like a panthress she was upon him, as he lay in the shadow of the somber trees. Tiny lanterns of stars and stripes hung in various designs from the arched branches, shedding a dim light over the still face that was turned upward, as in mute appeal for mercy. Frugatza raised her weapon on high, and aimed her deadly blow; but, with a hand of iron, Wendell caught her wrist.

"Are you mad, woman?" he cried; "would you be a murderess?" He succeeded in lifting her to her feet. "Leave the man to me, and I will redress your wrong," he commanded sternly. "Control yourself, madam!"

But this rebuke only intensified her rage. She wrenched her wrist from Wendell's grip, and turned her stiletto against him. She made three violent thrusts before he succeeded in forcing the weapon from her. He threw it far away, and with a masterful hand he partly dragged the fe-



rocious creature back to the hall, where he placed her in the care of her friends. Then he went back to the shadow of the trees where the mysterious man lay; and, though saturated in his own blood, Wendell knelt beside the prostrate form. He bent low to scan the features. In the fall the hat and mask had been knocked off, and his astonished eyes beheld the grim and solemn face of Miss Flintof. Disguised in masculine attire, her personal appearance was not improved. In her claw-like fingers she firmly clutched a jeweled hatpin. It was twisted and bent in her brave dash toward the reformation of the pagan world.

Exclamations from the spectators began, but a low "hush! hush!" from Wendell quieted the few who had followed him to the spot.

Brandy was used unsparingly to restore the unfortunate spinster, and consciousness soon returned. A carriage was brought, and when Wendell was lifting the avenging angel into it she opened her eyes, gave him a wild look of recognition, and freeing herself from his touch, she fled away into the darkness.

For two hours Theo sat alone in the dark that follows midnight, meditating tragically upon the coming encounter with Wendell.

"I will confront the man I once called husband with his guilt," she said in hissing tones, as she rehearsed her part. "No longer will I indulge in tears and entreaties. I'll spurn him from me, even though I die of grief the next moment. I'll leave him, give the reprobate his freedom, but a divorce—never! For the sake of



my children my name shall never be dragged through the mire of a divorce court." She clasped her hands over her aching eyes, and mechanically moved about her bedroom, chilled even though the heat of the summer night was intense.

"Will dawn never come?" she moaned. "Oh, the bitterness of despair, the agony of a broken heart—a trusting, loving, faithful heart, crushed by infidelity!" Sob—sob—sob—without a tear.

The clock struck two. Theo dropped on her knees by the open window. The very pulse of nature seemed hushed, and all earth was wrapped in solemnity. The moon, that had lighted her happy, smiling face early in the evening, was obscured by banks of clouds. The ominous silence that preceded a storm brooded over the land. The wronged wife raised her face to the frowning heavens, with a drawn and bitter expression. "There is no feeling left me!" she murmured; "my heart has turned to stone."

The gate latch clicked, but the sound brought no joy to her stricken soul. She crouched lower, while an icy shiver swept over her trembling frame. Footsteps stole slowly, softly up the stairway. Someone entered the bathroom, then all was silent. In desperation Theo arose, and stood before the window. The lace curtains almost enveloped her in their billowy folds.

The door opened cautiously, and her timid, fainting heart began to thump with the power of an engine. Wendell entered the room, clad in his dressing gown.

"Up so late, darling?" he questioned in sur-



prise. "Why, my little love you should have——"

"Never again!" interrupted Theo, with averted eyes and tragic air, as she waved him back. Then she turned haughtily, and fully equipped for the fray, she faced the transgressor.

Wendell's dressing gown hung open, and revealed blood drops on his shirt front. His face was pallid, and the blood-stained cloths which bound his hands silenced his wife's speech. She gasped for breath, and stared hard.

Stifled love reasserted itself, and softly whispering, "Hubby all wounded and ghastly! Will he die, and his wife despise him? Shall memories' wedding bells be changed to a solemn death knell?" Theo's pulses almost ceased at the mere thought; as remorse enveloped her in its rising tide. She forgot the man's sin, and remembered only the bitter feeling she had cherished against him. The sight of his physical suffering was more than she could bear. Pity possessed her gentle soul, and pierced her armor of revenge, throwing wide the doors of her heart to the prodigal, Love. Her husband's arms encircled her form, and stilled its trembling, as in silent fealty she clung to him. At his touch an expression of tender affection—of forgiveness and peace softened her features. With fervor their lips met, and the first sound that broke the stillness sealed the pardon.

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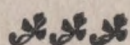
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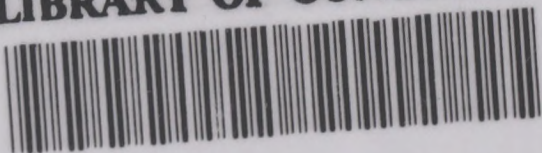
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